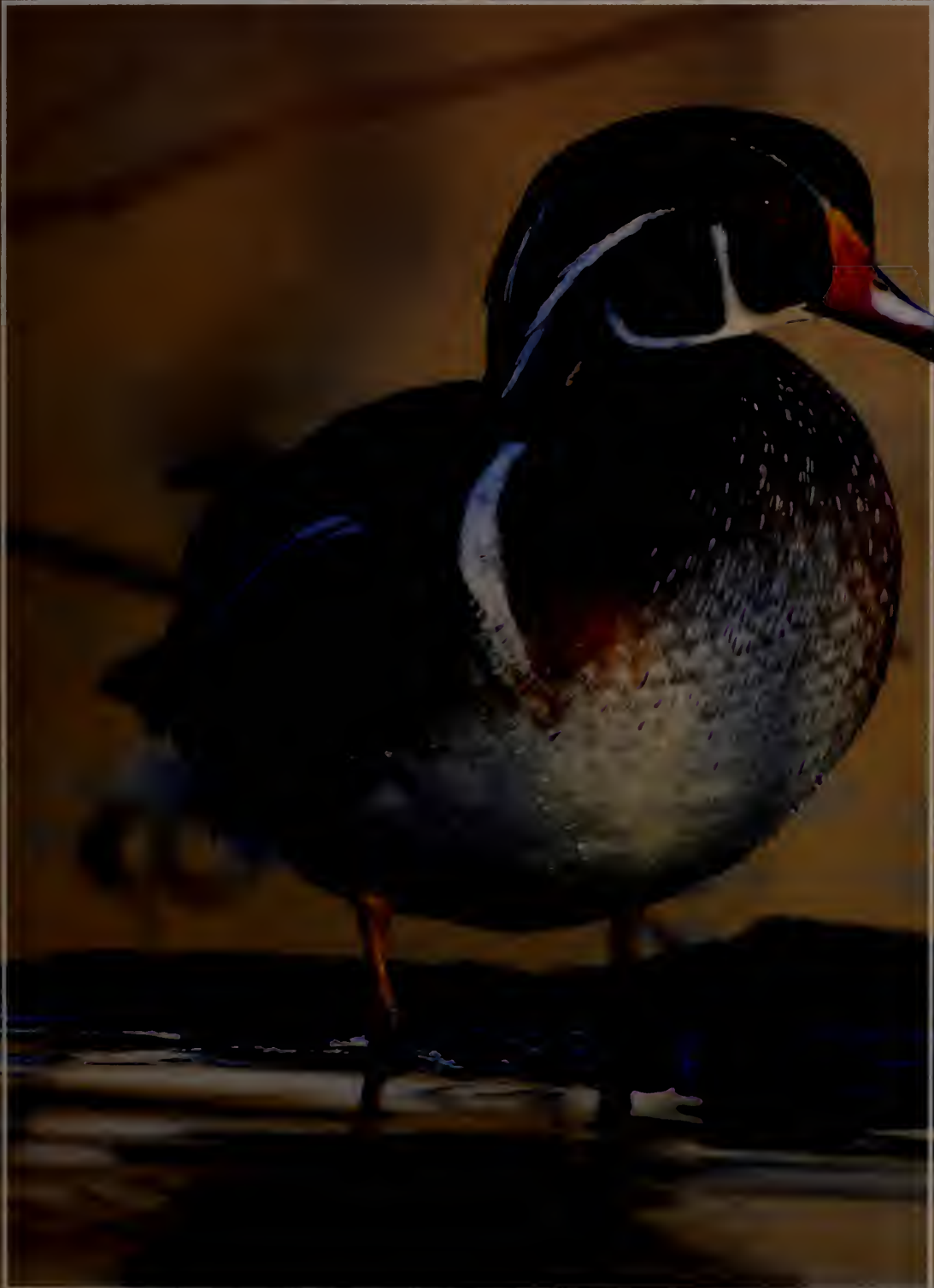


# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

OCTOBER 1998

ONE DOLLAR





## Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

It's an experience that we've all probably had. While wandering along the stream bank, utterly alone except for all the life of nature surrounding you, almost expecting to see the god of the river raise his green-gold head, and speak to you, you look down and there it is. No, it's not one of the creatures of Mother Nature. It's a pile of empty worm cups, fast food wrappers, and soda cans. The idyll is shattered irrevocably.

Unfortunately, the Department often receives letters and calls regarding the littering and defacing of our public wild areas which indicate that this experience happens all too often. Nothing is more frustrating than seeing a beloved piece of land or your favorite fishing spot being slowly ruined by unseen hands. It's a classic example of the thoughtless actions of a few just simply ruining the pleasure of many.

What, then, can we do to take care of the situation? The first action starts with each and every one of us cleaning up our own act. We think life would be so simple if we all just heeded the words "Leave it like you found it." But, it's all too easy to leave a tangle of fishing line or a broken lure on a bank that's already littered with soda cans. It seems less reprehensible because the

area already appears to be spoiled. This is the vicious circle of littering.

Breaking this circle is a major step to solving the problem, and oftentimes it means we have to "Leave it better than we found it." It's not only cleaning up our own litter and trash, but also that of others. Of course, there are limits to what one person on a day hike can do, but whenever you can, try to clean up. Another significant step is to get involved on a community level. Would your church group, hunt club, your child's scout troop, or your little league team be willing to get together one Saturday and really clean up an area? Or, you could join with many of the organized sportsman's groups that regularly organize cleanup campaigns. People are certainly less likely to litter a clean area, and the satisfaction that you're going to receive from giving back to nature will be immeasurable.

Solving the problem of litter is not easy, because it's a matter of changing behavior. But it can be done, because those of us who love and enjoy the outdoors greatly outnumber those who litter. When we all decide to "Leave it better than we found it," we'll be able to again take special pleasure in our CLEAN wild places. □



Lee Walker

*Fishing line, cans and paper trash can turn a place of beauty into an eyesore and create a danger to wildlife. Whenever possible, make sure when you leave your favorite boating, fishing or hunting spot that you leave it in better shape than when you arrived.*



### Mission Statement

*To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation; to promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.*



Commonwealth of Virginia  
James S. Gilmore III, Governor

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# VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

Cover: Wood duck drake, photo by Joe Mac Hudspeth

Background photo: Hungry Mother State Park by Dwight Dyke

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## October Journal

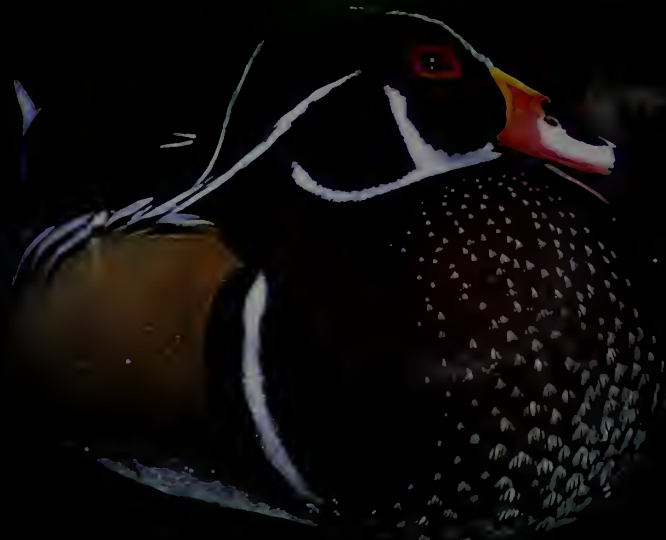
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*Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources*

VOLUME 20

NUMBER 10

# Early Season Wood Duck Tactics



©Rob Simpson

October's four-day waterfowl season may be Virginia's shortest hunting season, but it's certainly the sweetest.

by David Hart

**I**t happens so fast. One day, we're sitting in the hot shade on the edge of a cornfield, wiping sweat from our brow, as we wait for passing doves. Then, we awaken to cool mornings, which give way to mild days and clear, star-filled nights. October and autumn have arrived, and with them, archery season, squirrel season and the early duck season.

As far as hunting seasons go, the early waterfowl season is a short one—too short, many waterfowlers would agree. The fleeting, four-day season usually opens on a Wednesday in early October and offers a

small window of opportunity. But it's the best time to hunt the newest crop of wood ducks born and raised on the swamps and free-flowing rivers of Virginia. In fact, throughout much of the state, woodies are the only species, except for a few resident mallards, available to duck hunters. Besides lightning-fast flocks of teal, Canadian cold fronts haven't pushed the first wave of migrating waterfowl through Virginia yet.

"The blue-winged teal generally head south in September. They are the first ducks to migrate through Virginia," says Gary Costanzo, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' waterfowl biologist.



be severely affected if the season were much longer. Costanzo admits that waterfowl hunters in the western part of the state, where wood ducks are the most sought-after species, want a longer early season, while duck hunters in the east want a longer late season. He said the current structure is the best compromise.

"We estimate that Virginia has about 25,000 nesting pairs of wood ducks and the population is fairly stable," he adds. "That could mean we have somewhere around 200,000 woodies when the October hunting season comes around. Most of those are resident birds, but a few migrants show up that time of year."

Hunting opportunities for Virginia's most colorful duck are virtually limitless. Woodies thrive in every corner of the state and in a variety of habitats. Lazy tidal creeks, rushing mountain streams, and slow, methodical rivers all offer wood ducks food and shelter. Beaver ponds offer ideal habitat; lowland swamps and even farm ponds tucked away in a dense stand of trees offer woodies good living quarters. In other words, find water, particularly if it's surrounded by trees, and you've probably found a few wood ducks.

As their name implies, woodies thrive in wooded areas. They nest in hollow trees on or near water and even feed high in the branches of a riverside forest, although they spend most of their time dabbling in shallow water. Their diet consists of a variety of hard and soft mast, including acorns, seeds and wild grapes. It's not uncommon to flush a small flock of these colorful birds out of a tree overhanging a river as you drift by in a canoe.

Float-hunting is a productive method on any river, but if it has plenty of public access, or if it's narrow, make sure you get to the launch site early. It only takes one boat to move all the ducks off a small river and on to ponds or smaller creeks on private land, so it's a good idea to be the first one through.

Harry Heard, a Front Royal dentist and avid duck hunter, looks for-

ward to the October waterfowl season. He and his hunting partners float the Shenandoah River a couple of times during this early season and often come away with a limit of woodies.

"It's a great time to be on the river. The weather is nice, the scenery is great and the crowds are gone," he says. "If you hit it right, the duck hunting can be great."

Heard and his partners generally take turns manning the bow of the canoe. For safety's sake, only the person in the front is allowed to shoot. The man in the stern simply keeps the craft pointed down river.

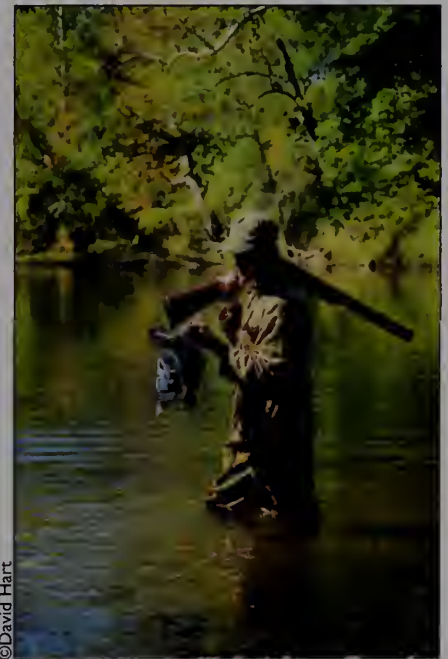
"I always insist that the guy in the back keep his shotgun cased. That just prevents any possibility for an accidental bath in the river. It's tough enough to keep a canoe upright with one guy swinging a shotgun on a flock of birds. Two would be impossible and impractical. We'll switch after the guy up front gets a shot or two," he says. "That way both people get a chance to put a few ducks in the boat."

On larger rivers, it's a good idea to hug one of the banks. That's the best way to sneak up on a flock of birds loafing behind a logjam or in a quiet slough off the main river channel, Heard says that most shooting will be more like a quail hunt.

*Wood ducks can be found throughout Virginia in wooded areas near water. They are also one of the few ducks that nest in Virginia, and large numbers of these beautifully colored birds can be found during the early season in October.*

"There are usually a few still around in October, but mostly, we have green-winged teal and wood ducks. The October season is really structured to take advantage of the resident wood duck population. In fact, they make up about 75 percent of the duck harvest during that early season."

He added that the season is so short simply because few migrating ducks have arrived in early October, and the wood duck numbers would



©David Hart

## Duck Hunting Opportunities

Many of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' wildlife management areas (WMA) offer some form of duck hunting opportunity. Several have access to large and small rivers; others are located on large marshes and have Department-constructed blinds. Here's a look at a few:

C.F. Phelps WMA has nearly three miles of frontage on the Rappahannock River.

Hardware River WMA offers jump-shooting opportunities on the Hardware River and float-hunting on the James River.

Amelia WMA borders the Appomattox River, and Chickahominy WMA borders the tidal portions of the Chickahominy River and Morris Creek.

Hog Island WMA offers controlled waterfowl hunting from Department-built blinds which are available by lottery.

For a complete list of WMAs that offer access to water and waterfowl, get a copy of "A Guide to Virginia's Wildlife Management Areas" by sending a check, payable to VIB, for \$5.00 to VIB, P.O. Box 27563, Richmond, VA 23220. Or the guides can be picked up for free at DGIF regional offices or Richmond headquarters.

"A lot of times, the ducks will take you by surprise," he explains. "The guy up front has to stay ready all the time. You never know when a single or a flock of ducks will take off from the shore, even when you don't expect to see any." Heard recalled a tactic he heard from a fellow float-hunter regarding camouflage. "This guy told me he wears bright colors. The resident ducks are used to seeing that all the time with all the fishermen in the summer, but if you wear camouflage and look and act

like a duck hunter, the birds tend to spook easier," he says.

Don't have a partner? Try stalking a creek or riverbank for ducks. Still-hunting, or jump-shooting, is one of the most challenging and rewarding methods and can test the skills of the best hunter. A few of Virginia's wildlife management areas border rivers and offer such opportunities. Otherwise, you need permission to walk the banks on private property.

Simply dress in full camouflage, ease your way up a riverbank and peer through the brush to search for



©Dwight Dyke

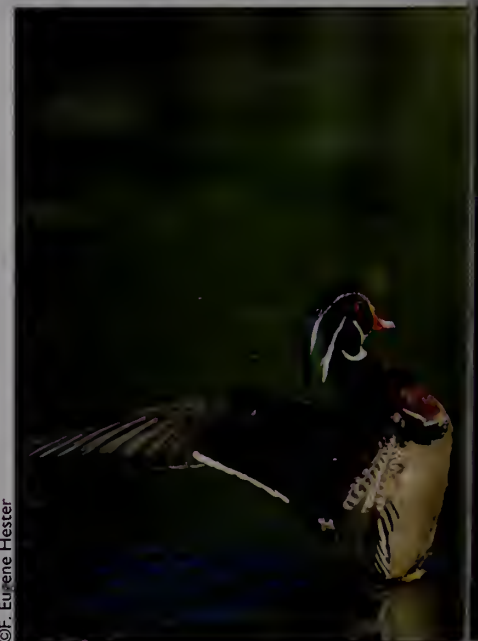
*If you like to hunt from a blind or jump shoot along one of Virginia's many rivers, lakes or ponds, October's early waterfowl season is a great time to get out. It is also important to remember that when hunting around water, safety is of the utmost importance.*

ducks loafing along shore. A pair of compact binoculars is as important to this type of hunting as a shotgun. Study likely-looking areas thoroughly. It's easy to overlook a small group of ducks resting on a tangle of tree limbs and debris.

When you spot birds, carefully back up, calculate the best route and sneak within range. Waders will help you retrieve downed birds in shallow water; otherwise, you need a dog, a boat or a fishing pole loaded with a large, weighted treble hook to retrieve your kill.

Centreville resident, Victor Popik, likes to walk riverbanks with a partner, leap-frogging their way up the wooded channel.

©David Hart



©F. Eugene Hester





"One guy will circle around and position himself in the brush along the bank several hundred yards up-river," explains Popik. "The other guy will walk right up the middle of the river and jump ducks to the hunter who is waiting. It's almost a fool-proof tactic, especially on smaller waters."

Typically, he said, the birds follow the winding river channel, rarely leaving the tunnel of overhanging branches.

Of course, the age-old method of sitting over a spread of decoys is always a great way to down a limit of ducks. Beaver ponds, swamps and tidal marshes are great places to use such a tactic. On bluebird days, however, it's a good idea to go to the ducks, particularly in the middle of

the day when birds tend to loaf in the mid-day shade.

What's the best load for early-season ducks? Non-toxic shot is required for all waterfowl hunting, and steel pellets are by far the most popular. Tungsten and bismuth loads are also available, and although they are said to pattern better and have a more effective range, they cost considerably more than shotgun shells loaded with steel. My advice is to use the best loads you can afford.

Wood ducks are fairly small, so knocking them down is relatively easy. Still, it's vital to use the right shot size. Most duck hunters agree that either #6 or #4 steel shot is a good choice for early-season wood ducks. Just remember that steel pel-

lets are lighter than lead, so limit your shooting distance.

Gun choice is also a matter of personal preference. Twelve-, 20-, and 16-gauges all work fine, and even big-bored 10-gauges will serve their purpose. The bottom line is to simply choose the gun you are most comfortable with and use the loads that pattern best in that gun.

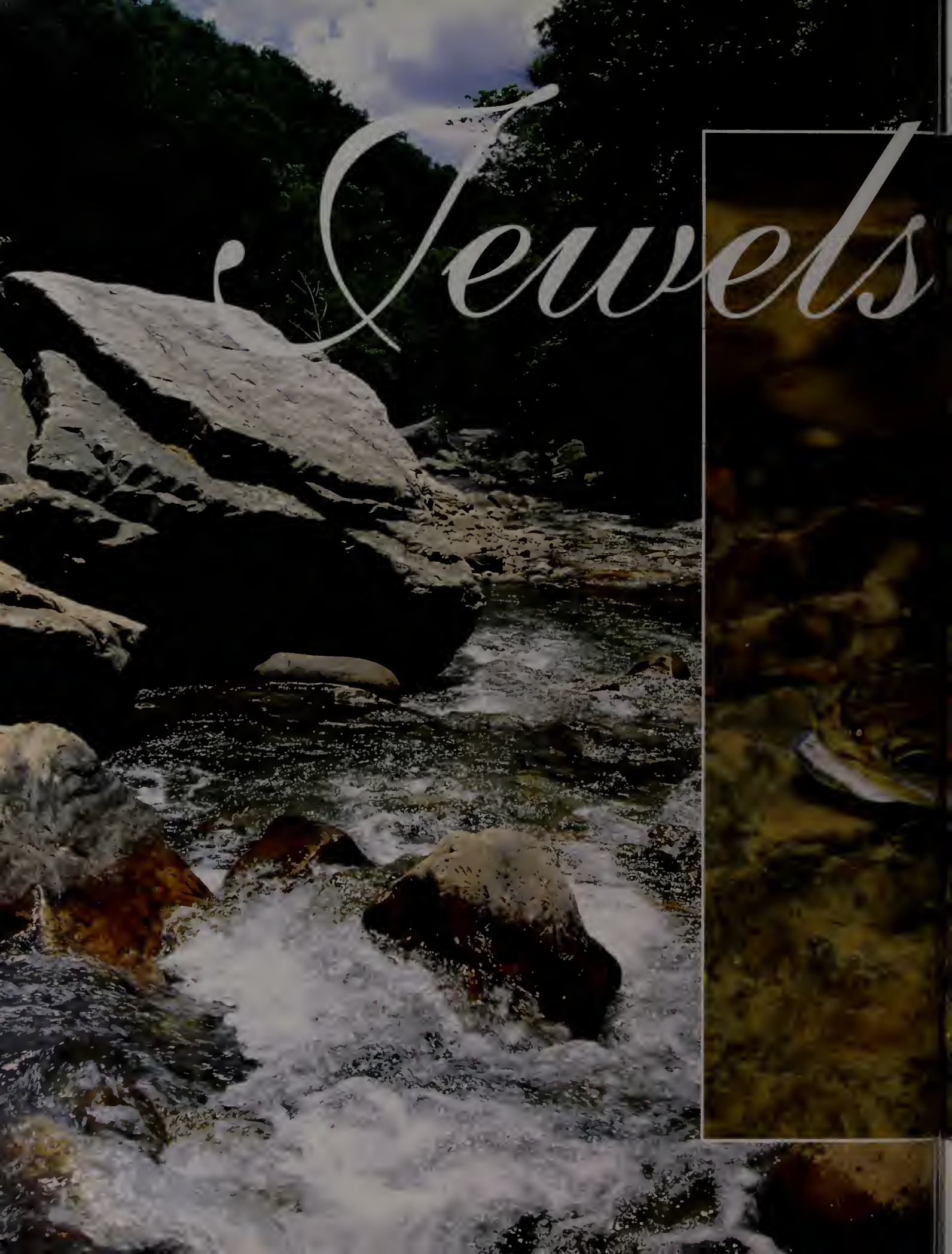
Just remember, like the wood ducks that disappear with the first hint of cold weather, this short, early duck season won't be around for long. Put it off for one day and you might miss one of Virginia's best hunting opportunities. □

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*David Hart is an outdoor writer for Journal Newspapers in Northern Virginia.*



# *Jewels*







# in the Stream

story and photos  
by King Montgomery

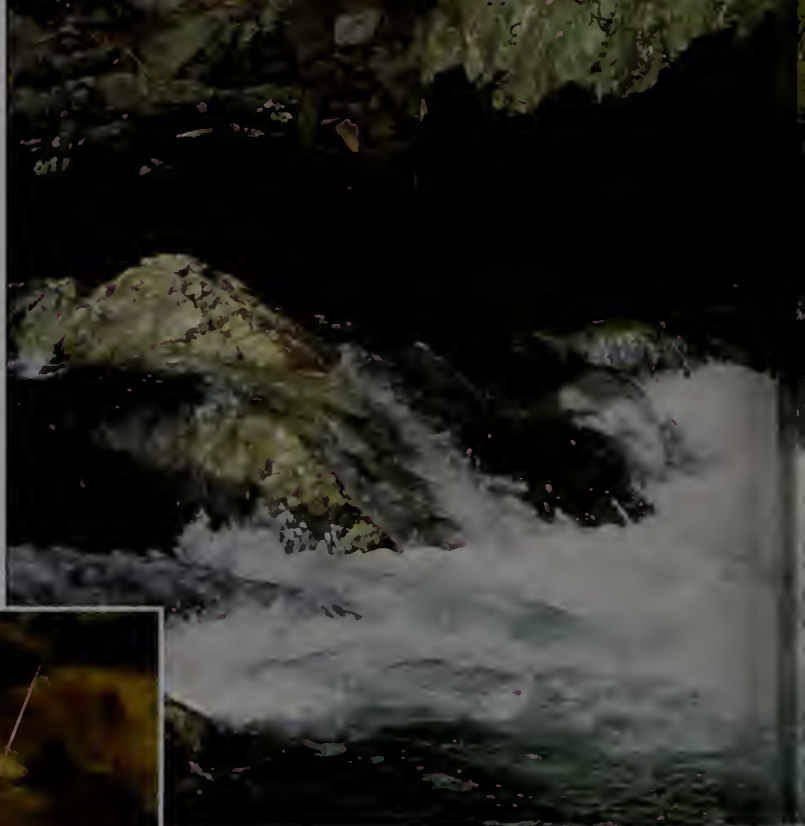
Brook trout are perhaps the most beautiful freshwater fish in the world. The wavy pattern on their backs, dorsal fins, and along the edges of the tail, stands out clearly when the fish are out of the water. Underwater, this disruptive camouflage helps hide the brookies from overhead predators such as the kingfisher, the great blue heron, the osprey—and anglers, too.

“...brookies,  
spotted crimson in pale blue  
halos, spotted lemon  
and white, backs  
moss-mottled-to-black, bellies  
shaded off to a golden ivory,  
fins striped orange and anthracite  
and white—”

John Engels, “*The Little Beaver*”

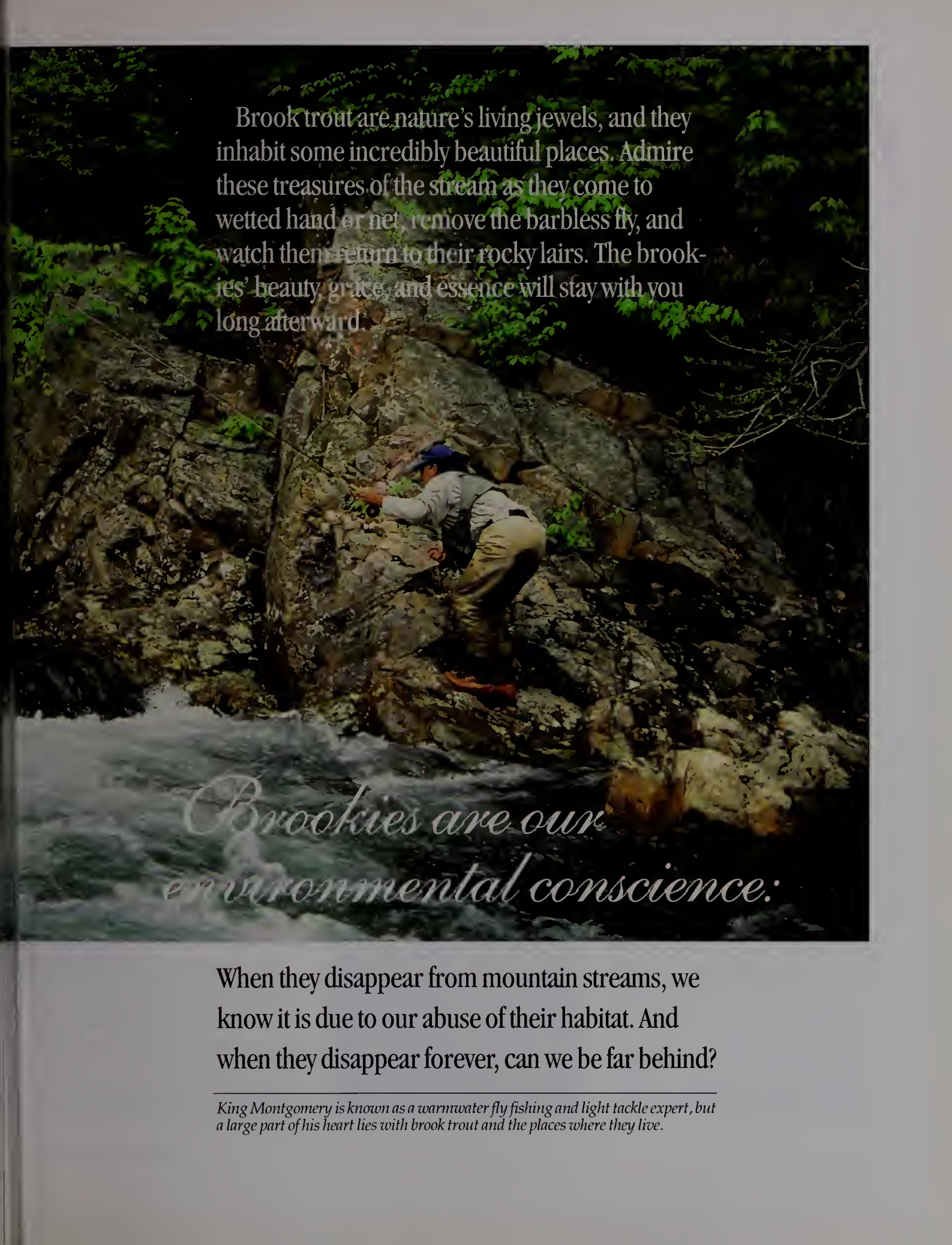


Brookies are actually char, the closest relative to “true” trout, but they will always be trout to me. They are unique in many ways, but perhaps their most distinguishing characteristic is that they are wild, native fish that have lived in clear, free-flowing mountain streams since the last ice age.



Native Eastern brook trout, the Virginia State fish, average 6 to 7 inches in length; so if you are looking for trophies or skillet fare, go elsewhere. If, however, you prefer quiet, serene surroundings that calm the nerves and awaken the senses, visit the home of the brook trout.



A photograph of a fly fisherman in a river. The fisherman is wearing a blue cap, a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, and tan waders. He is crouched on a large, mossy rock in the middle of a stream, holding a fishing rod. The water is turbulent and white with foam. The background is filled with dense green foliage and trees.

Brook trout are nature's living jewels, and they inhabit some incredibly beautiful places. Admire these treasures of the stream as they come to wetted hand or net, remove the barbless fly, and watch them return to their rocky lairs. The brookies' beauty, grace, and essence will stay with you long afterward.

*Brookies are our  
environmental conscience:*

When they disappear from mountain streams, we know it is due to our abuse of their habitat. And when they disappear forever, can we be far behind?

---

*King Montgomery is known as a warmwater fly fishing and light tackle expert, but a large part of his heart lies with brook trout and the places where they live.*



# A Natural Comb

*Some of the best hunting  
in the Commonwealth  
can be found at  
Virginia's State Parks.*

by Bonnie Phillips  
photos by Dwight Dyke



Hungry Mother State Park

Hungry Mother State Park

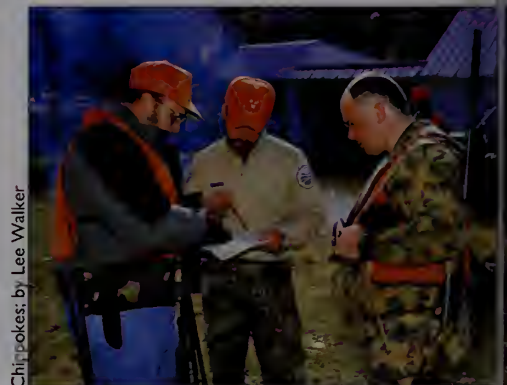
Since the 1930's, Virginia's State Parks have offered various hunting opportunities throughout the Commonwealth. As a hunter, I especially appreciate the safety factor associated with hunting in state parks. Open hunts are only allowed at parks where a safety buffer can separate the hunting areas from the general use areas. Other parks offer special deer lottery hunts, and during this time areas of the park are closed. These hunts are organized and conducted by park staff, with assistance from the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), and are used primarily for deer management.

The diversity of opportunities offered at the state parks makes them a unique and enjoyable experience. Miles of trails provide easy access

for early scouting trips, and don't forget to take along your camera. Many of the parks offer some breathtaking views of unblemished beaches, like False Cape, or exhilarating heights, like Grayson Highlands. Here are just a few of the great hunting opportunities that you can experience this season.

## Chippokes Plantation State Park

If you're a history buff, Chippokes Plantation State Park depicts life as it was on one of the oldest working plantations in the state. Three turn-of-the-century tenant houses have been recently renovated for overnight use and are available for rent at Chippokes. The quaint, cozy surroundings take you



Chippokes; by Lee Walker

back to another time in history. Nestled among centuries-old trees along the banks of the James River in Surry County, a visit to the plantation is truly an educational and rewarding experience.

The Chippokes Southern Heritage Deer Hunt will be held this year on November 21, 1998, and in a

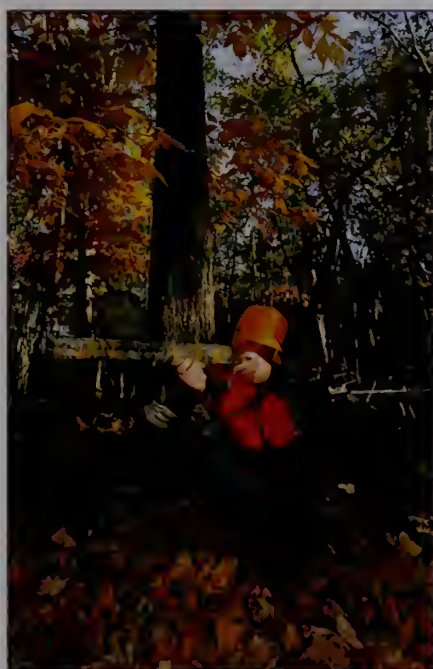




*With an abundance of deer in a natural setting, Virginia's State Parks offer deer hunters an excellent chance to broaden their hunting experiences. From the sand dunes of the coast to the rugged peaks of the mountains, one only needs to pick up the phone to find that special out-of-the-way place to hunt.*

true southern tradition at one of the oldest working farms in the nation. It's a great way to recapture a 19th century style hunt on a 1,000-acre, 1619 plantation.

The hunts were a tradition in the early days. The hunters would gather in the twilight of a frosty morning for an early breakfast and a blessing of the hounds before heading to the woods. White-tailed deer harvested back then were used as a major source of food and clothing and were traded by our forefathers.



That's how a \$1.00 bill got the nickname, "a buck."

The modern hunt features three hearty meals, a blessing of the hounds, and a carriage ride to the hunt. A local Surry County hunt club serves as hunt masters and provides the hounds. Wildlife is plentiful and the scenery is splendid. "In the late afternoon you can watch herds of deer grazing in the fields," said Danette McAdoo, the park manager at Chippokes. "The hunts are designed in cooperation with the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as a wildlife management tool, and this helps to maintain the health of the herd at Chippokes."

I also believe the Heritage hunt is a great opportunity for women to experience the thrill of the hunt while enjoying the great outdoors and hopefully getting a glimpse of those wonderful elusive whitetails. The hunts are safe, well organized and each participant is dropped off at a stand. It's great to sit in the woods, listen to the baying of the hounds, and feel your heart throb as they get closer. To see the unmistakable flashing of those seemingly huge whitetails is an experience in itself.

Participation for the Heritage Hunt is limited to 30 hunters. Deer of either sex can be harvested under the Deer Management Assistance Program, (DMAP). Shotguns are used. The cost: (includes meals) is \$250.00 for an adult, \$150.00 for a child 12-17 (sharing a stand), or \$50.00 for a non-hunting companion. A valid hunting license, hunter safety certificates and blaze orange are required for all participants. For more information on the hunt, call Chippokes at (757) 294-392. In addition to the Heritage Deer Hunt, Chippokes also offers a lottery hunt. All lottery hunts with the parks include a \$10.00 hunting fee and a \$5.00 application fee.

### Pocahontas State Park

Great overnight accommodations are available at many of the parks. Pocahontas is sporting a new 65-unit campground with electric and water hookups, and two bath-





*No matter where you live in Virginia, you're only a couple of hours drive from a State Park. For the weekend hunter or the urban outdoorsman, these parks represent the ideal chance to take in Virginia's natural resources.*



houses. Units are open until December 1st. Pocahontas has 4,100 acres available for hunting. The park is located in Chesterfield County, off Route 10 on Route 655 (Beach Road).

### Fairy Stone State Park

Besides offering a 50-site campground, Fairy Stone offers rustic log cabins at a discounted price during hunting season. It serves as a great base camp for hunting the nearby 12,000 acres of public lands. Almost 5,000 acres of this land has been set aside as a Quality Deer Management Area. Only bucks with four or more points on one side qualify to be harvested during buck season. Antlerless deer can still be harvested during the regular doe season. The remaining 7,000 acres are open to regular deer harvesting.

Park Manager, John Grooms stated, "Through cooperative efforts with Jay Jeffreys, local wildlife biologist at the Department of Game

and Inland Fisheries, and the Corps of Engineers, we hope to offer premier hunting opportunities for the future with the introduction of the Quality Deer Management Program at Fairy Stone." Fairy Stone is nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Patrick and Henry counties.

### Smith Mountain Lake State Park

Smith Mountain Lake State Park is located on the second largest body of water in the state; it offers some of the best striped bass fishing around. Besides fishing, it also provides for some great hunting. The park offers archery and muzzleloading lottery hunts.

The park has 50 primitive campsites that include picnic tables and grills. New cabins are due to open some time this year and should be available for hunters in 1999. The park is located on the north shore of the lake in Bedford County.

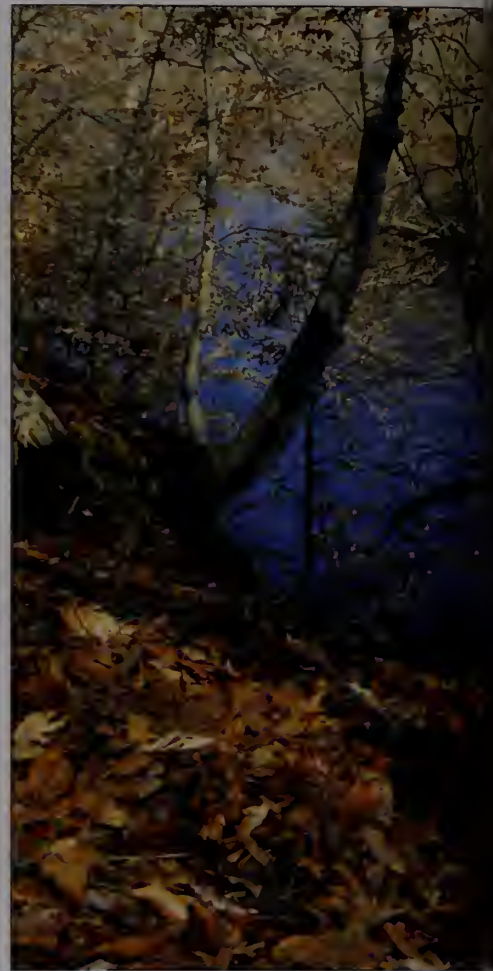
According to Brian Heft, park manager, "We've worked with the biologists at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries over the last three years, and we've gathered data which indicates an overpopulation of deer in the park. Our primary goal is to reduce the numbers in order to maintain a healthy herd."

### Hungry Mother State Park

Hungry Mother State Park, in southwest Virginia, is also available for hunting. The park is located in Smyth County, off Interstate 81. It has 43 campsites with centrally located bathhouses on three campgrounds. Electrical and water hookups are available at 32 sites. Rustic cabins and the Hemlock Haven Conference Center are available for rent at Hungry Mother from March through December.

### Grayson Highlands State Park

Grayson Highlands, located high in the Appalachian Mountains, also offers hunting among some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in Virginia. The park is adjacent to the Jefferson National Forest and



*Many of Virginia's State Parks offer hunters not only the chance to hunt, but an opportunity to stay and enjoy some unique accommodations. For a total outdoor experience, camping or the chance to stay in a rustic cabin is available during the hunting season in many of the parks.*





Caledon Natural Area

## Hunting Guide to Virginia's State Parks

1. Fairy Stone, Patrick and Henry Counties
2. Grayson Highlands, Grayson County
3. Hungry Mother, Smyth County
4. Pocahontas, Chesterfield County
5. Sailor's Creek Battlefield, Amelia County
6. Caledon Natural Area, King George County
7. Chippokes Plantation, Surry County
8. False Cape, Virginia Beach
9. Mason Neck, Fairfax County
10. Smith Mountain Lake, Bedford County
11. York River, James City County

For more information on Hunting Virginia's State Parks call 1-800-933 Park (7275), or in the Richmond area, call (804) 225-3867.

Mount Rogers, the highest point in Virginia. This park is equipped with 73 drive-in campsites, 40 with electric and water hook-ups, and two bathhouses; it also provides stables for visitors with horses. The park is on U.S. 58 midway between Independence and Damascus.

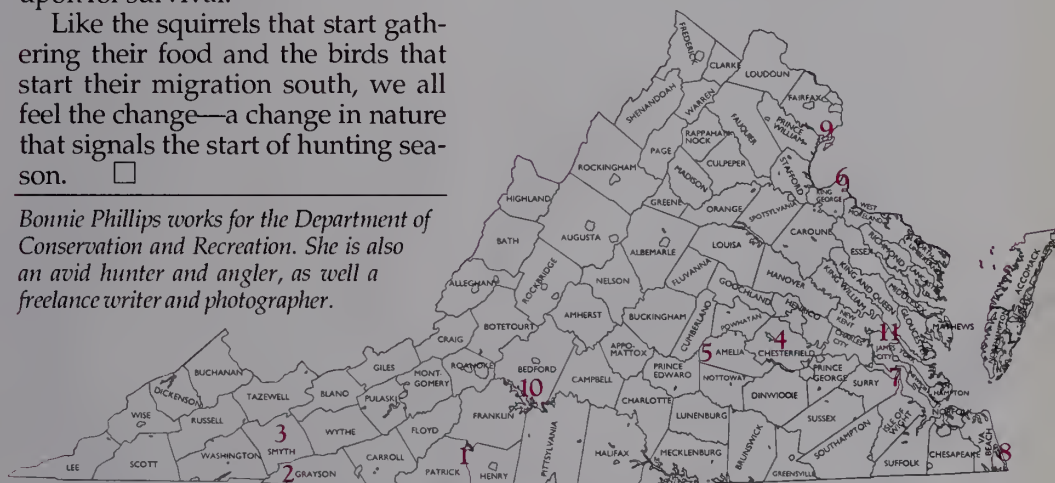
Under the direction of David Brickley, one of the duties of the Department of Conservation and Recreation is overseeing 43 state parks and natural areas. "Working with biologists at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, hunting is used as a wildlife management tool to control deer populations in our parks. Staff is dedicated to promoting safe and ethical practices, while providing quality outdoor experiences," said Mr. Brickley.

For me, the hunting experience has been a form of awakening. Sitting in the shade of a tree, overlooking a harvested cornfield with my dog beside me, I watch my husband

shoot as I work the dog. A September evening breeze brushes my cheeks, and I feel the hint of an autumn chill. My neck bristles as senses deep inside, that have long lay dormant, begin to stir. Senses that long ago our ancestors depended upon for survival.

Like the squirrels that start gathering their food and the birds that start their migration south, we all feel the change—a change in nature that signals the start of hunting season. □

*Bonnie Phillips works for the Department of Conservation and Recreation. She is also an avid hunter and angler, as well as a freelance writer and photographer.*



*If you're looking for a safe and enjoyable place to hunt, try Virginia State Parks. You may find that it is also the perfect place to introduce a youngster to the great sport of hunting.*

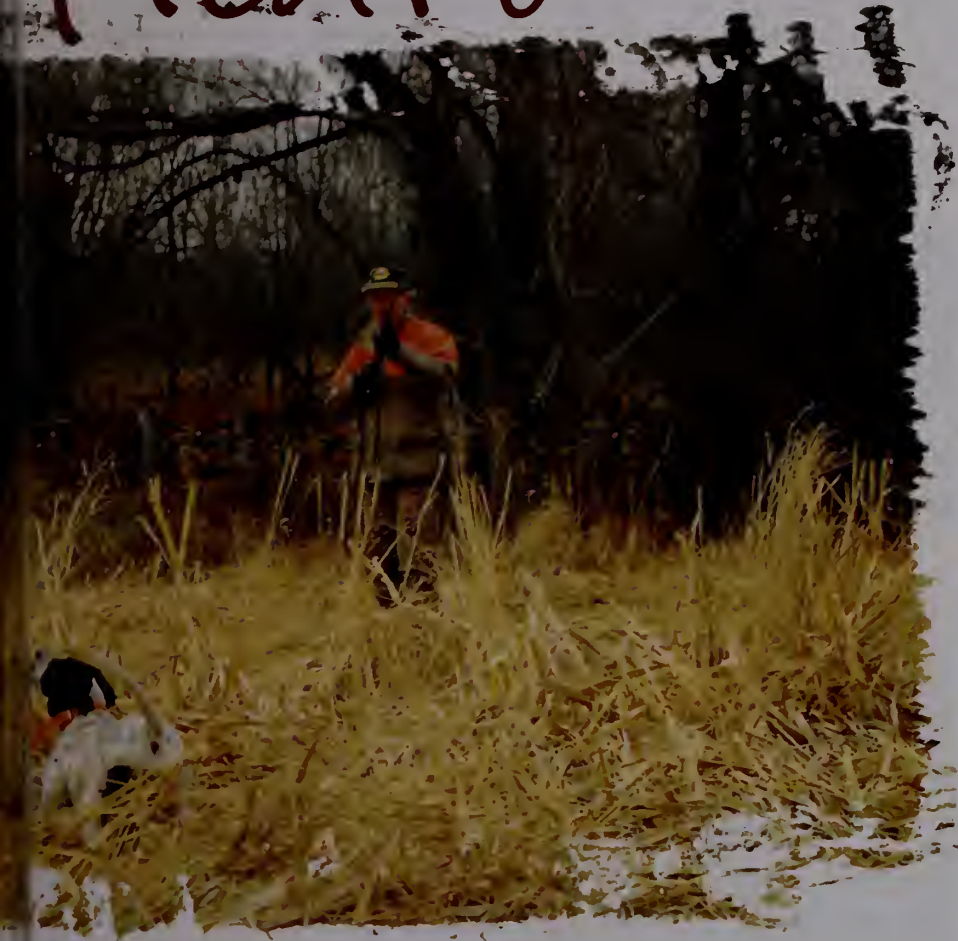


# A Quail for the





# Heart



©Soc Clay

by Marc Puckett

Except for the modern grain combines, it could have been 1936. Each breath drawn covered my teeth with fine grit. Dust clouds rolled with every combine pass, obscuring vision beyond a few feet, leaving dark dirt circles in the sweat streams around my eyes. I must have looked like a coal miner driving down that dusty farm road in eastern North Carolina. My thoughts drifted home to the cool Blue Ridge mountains. Casually looking at the road, in an after lunch daze, I saw the reason for my being there.

The quail bevy popped out on the path just ahead of me. Hen in front,

*Quail hunting has long been a cherished tradition in Virginia and throughout the South. In recent years the population of these game birds has been dropping, and wildlife biologists are hard at work to find out why.*

the twelve little ones formed what looked like a brigade of toy Weebles wobbling behind her. Mr. Bobwhite watchfully flanked the "tom thumbs" on the open field side, his head tilted, keeping an alert eye skyward.

I couldn't help laughing. They really did look like toy Weebles. Each bobbing side to side, seemingly righting themselves before falling sidewise into the dirt. I still think of the old "Weebles wobble, but they don't fall down" commercials every time I see my favorite birds. Just seeing them brightened my mood.

Though located "a thousand miles from nowhere," sometimes going a full week without talking to another human, I always had my quail. They were what brought me to North Carolina. I came to study these interesting birds and earn a masters in wildlife biology.

Flash back to 1968. These were days when old country stores in Virginia still had pot-bellied stoves as center pieces, often surrounded by overalled locals trading hunting stories. You could walk into one of those stores with a game pouch trailing feathers and not worry about raising eyebrows. I remember one store in particular where, for 15 cents, a hunter or lumberjack hungry from a cold day afield, could buy a bologna and cheese sandwich with slices of each a half-inch thick. There were 86,713 quail hunters in Virginia that year, outnumbered slightly by squirrel, rabbit and deer hunters. Those "birdhunters" harvested 1,380,405 quail during 710,095 hunter days afield.

During the same year in Virginia, there were 109,017 deer hunters. Today there are well over 200,000. In 1968, those deer hunters harvested 30,755 deer. Compare that to the more than 200,000 harvested annually now. Obviously things have changed. Small game populations, particularly quail populations, declined dramatically through the 80s and early-90s. As many a "favorite" species declined, the numbers of those loving to pursue them fell, too. We have approximately 25,000 quail hunters statewide now. Many of these are "part time" quail hunters going afield only occasionally. Annual 1990s quail harvests hovered below 200,000. Will one of our most fascinating birds ever be commonplace again? Have we lost a segment of our hunter population, never to return?

Many who read *Virginia Wildlife* magazine are aware that the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries



(DGIF) is not ready to give up on quail as a species, or the grand small game hunting heritage of the Commonwealth. July will mark the end of the first two years of the implementation phase of Virginia's Bobwhite Quail Management Plan. To date, our agency biologists have worked with over 800 landowners, conducted 20 workshops with an at-

cline, field sparrows decline 86 percent of the time. The same is true for loggerhead shrikes (86 percent of cases), brown thrashers (87 percent of cases), yellow-breasted chats (82 percent of cases), prairie warblers (100 percent of cases) and even northern cardinals (56 percent of cases). And, ask any cottontail rabbit enthusiast, they see far fewer rabbits crossing their driveways, or nib-

be called the Virginia Early-Successional Wildlife Management Plan. The "Plan" is helping DGIF fulfill its mission, "... to protect, manage and enhance all Virginia's wildlife."

Take a shorter trip through time with me. It is November 30, 1997. My cousin and her husband, their two sons, our three dogs and I are driving down a rain soaked Interstate 77, heading south from Beck-



Dwight Dyke

*It's clear that good habitat plays a major role in the nesting and survival of young quail.*

tendance of over 900, cost-shared over 2000 acres of habitat and reached a vast audience with over 100 quail-related presentations. Readers may ask, "why so much effort for this species?" Here are some reasons—a few you may never have considered.

Quail are "early-successional" species. This means they seek out habitats that have not completed the natural progression from brushy, weedy fields to mature woodland. They love old fields spattered with broomsedge and blackberry brambles, those not invaded by fescue. Weedy fencelines and brushy woods edges are also key components of the quail's home. All their favorite habitats declined markedly since the mid-60s, a primary reason our springtimes are often lacking bobwhite calls.

An observant wildlife watcher will notice other springtime voids. Many songbirds associated with bobwhite habitats are suffering, too. In areas where quail and field sparrows occur together and quail de-



Dwight Dyke

cling garden lettuce each summer.

As a biologist helping to carry out the quail plan, I take great satisfaction in the knowledge that every acre of "quail" habitat I help put on the ground and every quail brood this habitat helps survive to form a fall covey, also represents untold numbers of field sparrows, chats, thrashers and cottontails. The Department's Plan might more aptly

ley, West Virginia. It is approaching 8:00 p.m. We are nearing the end of a nine-day journey to southwestern Kansas. Along the way, we fueled an empty rented sport utility vehicle at least 15 times. We stayed in two hotels, ate at over 10 restaurants and patronized many roadside coffee and snack shops. When we arrived in Kansas, we each purchased \$75.00 worth of various out-of-state hunt-



ing licenses, several boxes of shotgun shells and many hunting miscellany. Before departing Virginia, I purchased two sets of bird dog boots, a new dog locator collar and enough dog food to last throughout our trek. We love our Kansas relatives dearly, but it was their promise of fantastic quail hunting that "put us over the top" in deciding to make the voyage.

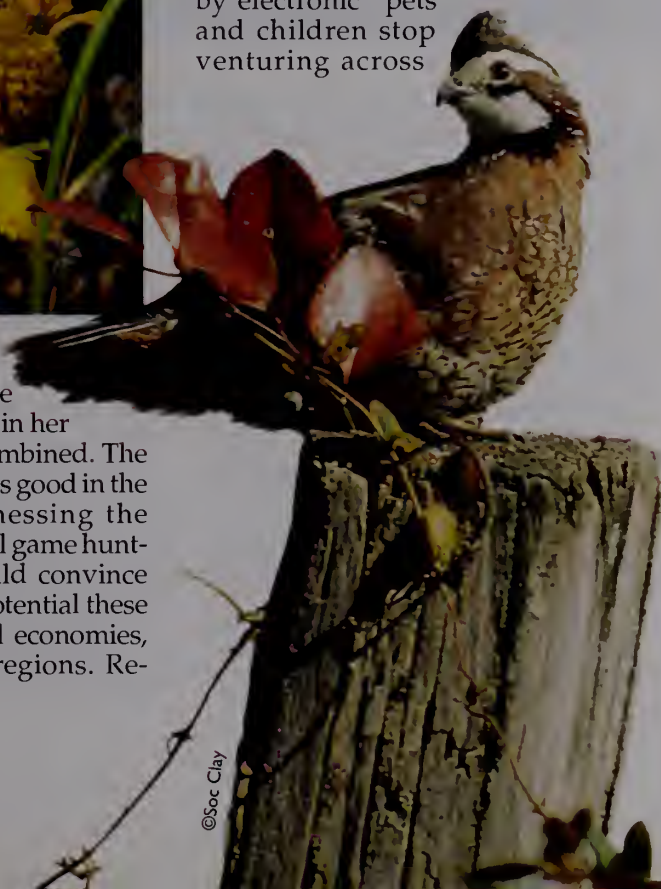


There were quail there. My Shell had more points in five days than in her previous three years combined. The bird hunting was once as good in the Old Dominion. Witnessing the above examples of small game hunting expenditures should convince you of the enormous potential these activities have for local economies, particularly in rural regions. Re-

search conducted by Dr. Wes Burger, of Mississippi State University, found that, in 1991 alone, the economic impact of bobwhite hunting in the southeast exceeded \$193 million. During the same year in Virginia the average quail hunter spent nearly \$850 on their beloved sport.

So many reasons go beyond facts. I remember the valuable lessons I learned following Patches, our rabbit dog. I remember his throaty bawling and how it carried on grey November days, as threatening snow clouds loomed. I remember how I felt as he drew closer, with me standing on a brushpile searching for the rabbit I knew would show. And I remember Shell, my setter, when she was a tiny black and white puppy, belly surrounded by clumsy appendages and velvet fur, her 8-inch tail high and stubby nose pointing a quail wing on the end of a fishing line. And I see her slamming into a "fishhook" point, and bent into the wind after passing a covey hunkering low in a lespedeza field border with me, remembering all the time and effort spent getting her to this exclamation mark.

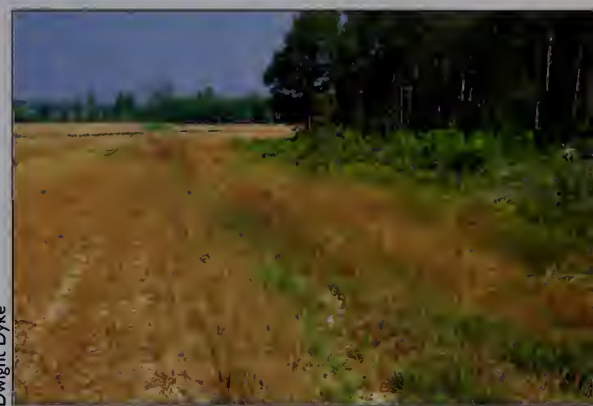
Today I sit here thinking of myself. At 35, I'm one of the youngest birdhunters I know. What will become of our society as hunters continue to decline, as dogs are replaced by electronic "pets" and children stop venturing across



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broomsedge bottoms with Grandpa and ole' Sally. I know crime rates are high. I know divorce rates continue to climb. Certainly it is not all related to a loss of rural values, but some of it is. Ask yourself this, as hunting declines in our world does that mean we are really more civilized?

Lastly, I remember the comments of so many landowners I worked with this past season. A farmer in



Dwight Dyke

*Virginia's Bobwhite Quail Management Plan is designed to assist landowners with workshops and cost-sharing farming practices. (Above) This field is a good example of where a landowner has left the edges weedy and brushy, which are key components to excellent quail habitat.*

Cumberland County, whose family began tilling the land there 150 years ago, remembered fondly how, "....there were coveys all around 30 years ago. You could hear them any spring morning, calling back and forth across the road. I never hunted them. My nephew did. I do all I can for them now. I just miss seeing them." Or the lady in Amelia County who said, "I just miss having them around. The quail, they never bothered anything. I had a covey that came to my bird feeder every fall. They'd scratch and peck the seed my songbirds knocked to the ground. I could watch them for the longest time. I have a special place in my heart for the quail."

For more than any other reason, I work so hard because I want to produce another "quail for the heart."

*Marc Puckett is a quail biologist for VDGIF and a avid hunter.*

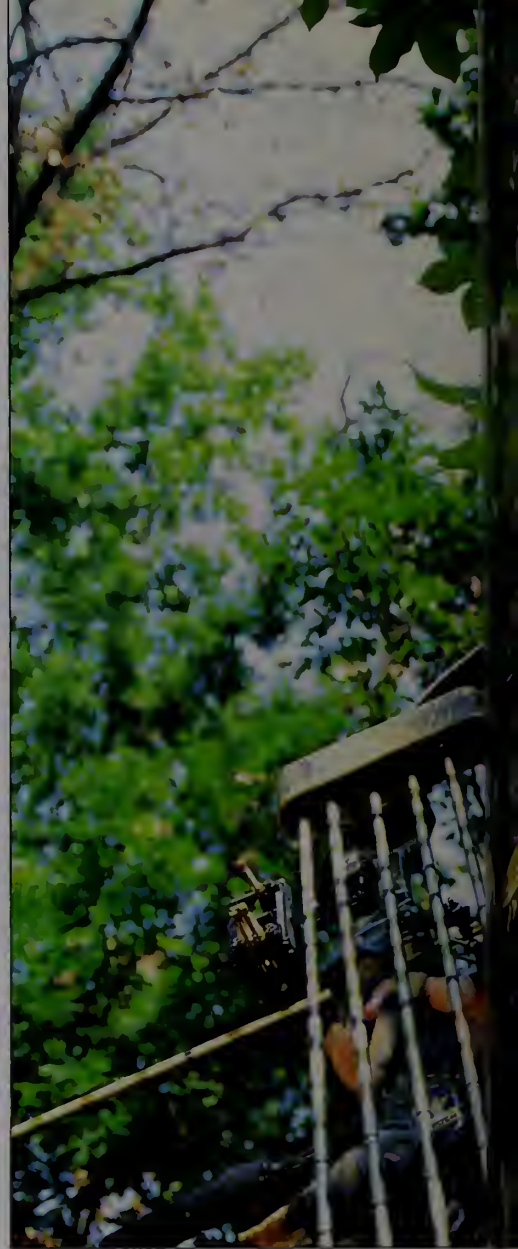


# Falling From Safety

*Hunting with tree stands is becoming more and more popular, but do you know how to use them properly?*

by Richard L. Holdcraft  
photos by Dwight Dyke

**Y**ou walked quietly into the woods being careful not to make too many crunching sounds as you trod across the dry leaves. Scent spread around, you put the climbing tree stand on a likely oak and shinnied up the tree. Dawn spreads warm sunshine through the branches and you begin to nod as the chill leaves the woods. A sudden crack of a breaking branch and you, rifle in hand, react. Quick movement, just enough, and you're airborne, heading downward 15 feet to solid ground and serious injury. The use of tree stands for hunting increases each year and this scenario may play out many times in our Virginia woods.



*Use a safety belt whenever you are using a tree stand, especially while climbing or descending. (Above) Nikki Driscoll likes the advantage that a tree stand offers while hunting near her home in Culpepper.*

In 1993, Deer & Deer Hunting magazine published a series of excellent articles on tree stand safety. They also conducted a survey designed to discover how falls occur and the severity of the resulting injuries. The information gathered in that survey is astonishing. Here are some highlights.

- The average age of tree stand users is 40.7 years old.
- The average fall was 11.1 feet.
- 48.7 percent indicated they always used their safety belt.
- 37.2 percent (one-third of the responses) indicated they had fallen from a stand at least once.
- Of those that fell, 83.2 percent said they were not wearing their safety belt.

- 35 percent said the reason they fell out of the tree stand was due to the branch breaking, hand or arm slipped, belt broke, or they blacked out.

- Note that 3 percent of the falls from tree stands resulted in permanent crippling injuries. Out of 2,300 responses that amounts to 69 people who will not enjoy a full life again. This doesn't take into account the number of hunters that suffer fatal injuries from falls.

These statistics may scare many individuals and cause them to avoid





tree stands altogether. However, when used sensibly, tree stands can be safe. As a practicing safety and health professional and college educator with over 20 years experience, I would not make such statements unless I felt confident of them. Would I put my own children in one if I felt they were unsafe? Hardly!

Tree stands offer the hunter a wider range of visibility. Seeing the game at a greater distance gives the hunter a chance to take a prepared shot instead of a quicker shot as the game passes you on the ground. Remember that one of the goals of the hunter safety education program is to teach individuals to carefully aim all shots and quickly dispatch the animal. When you're in an elevated

shooting position, you can see the deer coming and have time to make an accurate shot.

When the hunter is positioned above the ground, his scent is dissipated over a greater distance. Scent dissipation is affected by eddies of the wind and other weather conditions. It is not likely that game will pick up the scent until they are well within range of the hunter. Deer don't expect danger from above, and a slight movement made by the hunter will not be as easily detected. Since deer rely heavily on their senses, especially sight and smell, if they cannot see or pick up the scent of the hunter, they could more easily end up on the dinner table.

Another advantage of tree stands is that any missed shots taken from a

tree stand enter the ground at an angle, which is much safer. A stray bullet is not likely to injure another hunter. If your aim is true, top down shots exit the animal out the bottom and most often provides a better blood trail to track the animal and aid in its recovery.

A hunter in a stand, not moving about in the woods, greatly reduces the possibility of being mistaken for any game. And, wearing blaze orange from an elevated position lets other hunters see them at a greater distance.

Of course, with anything there are disadvantages. Portable tree stands have to be carried into and out of the woods. They are often large and bulky and make a lot of





*Permanent stands that are properly constructed and are checked each year offer hunters, like Jason Miller, a safe and comfortable location to hunt. It is important to remember that you should first climb into the stand without your gun. Then by using a haul-line, pull your unloaded gun up into the stand, making sure that the rope is attached securely away from the trigger.*

noise. Some types of stands have to be erected before the season and removed at the end. In doing so they restrict the hunter's ability to relocate the stand due to changing patterns of the deer.

Most stands are open to the elements. There are a few very expensive models that look like miniature hotels with umbrellas, curtains, and some even have a portable heater in them. Most of us cannot afford those luxuries. For handicapped hunters, there are now models that use electric motors and hydraulics to elevate stands big enough to comfortably accommodate wheelchairs.

Another factor to consider is the adjustment of the shot from an elevated position. This is a subject of much discussion. Most firearms used for deer hunting are flat shooters up to several hundred yards. Although bowhunters must adjust for the shot, a rifle hunter could argue the point. The amount of rise and fall on the bullet shot from an elevated position is negligible from my point of view.

In reviewing the statistical re-

ports of hunters that have fallen from tree stands, I find that more than a few claimed to have become victims due to drowsiness or illness. Having been in a number of deer camps over the years, it is also possible they may have celebrated too hard the night before, stayed up late playing cards, and just didn't get enough sleep.

The majority of accidents involving tree stands have occurred when the hunter was ascending or descending the stand. Either they failed to use their safety belt, or they slipped on the steps during the maneuver. Caution must be exercised

whenever going up or down from the stand. As my precocious teenage daughter says, "hunters cannot fly." Therefore they should always use a safety belt whenever ascending or descending a tree stand.

Let's look at the various types of tree stands commonly used by today's hunters. Basically there are three types; natural, permanent, and fabricated. Natural stands are simply those that Mother Nature provides us. Most frequently used is the fork of a tree. The hunter climbs the tree and hopes that it is comfortable enough to sit or stand in until a deer comes down the trail. The nice thing





about natural stands is that there is nothing to carry into the woods. There is no noise in setting up or taking down. You generally are not advertising your position to the game. Depending on the type of tree chosen, the hunter does not leave much of a silhouette. There is no cost involved in using natural stands, and you can relocate positions with little difficulty.

The problem with natural stands is that seldom will you find the perfect perch. Because of this shooting positions can be rather awkward and unsafe. Since natural stands restrict lateral movements, many

stands offer a wide range of visibility, but most often result in damaging trees, unless stand-alone towers are built. The problem with many permanent stands is that not all hunters are construction wizards. The materials have to be carried into the woods. By being exposed to the elements year-round, they require repair before use each year. Construction materials can be expensive, especially if you build a number of stands on the property. And, you cannot relocate the stand to meet the changing patterns of the deer. Permanent tree stands are usually nailed to trees. If you are hunting on



*With a little preseason scouting a hunter will usually find a good location when constructing a permanent tree stand. The advantages are, you're familiar with your surroundings, and you will have prior knowledge of any deer movement in the area. It is important to check your stand each year for reliability.*

hunters have turned on a deer only to miss the shot or fall out of the tree due to the unsafe positions. If you're a big, burly type of person, the limbs may not support your weight. Ascending and descending can be noisy and the heights above ground will vary based on the available trees. Many bowhunters will practice at predetermined heights and not take into consideration the differences in the height of trees.

Quite often hunters will construct permanent stands along known deer trails. They are usually designed for the hunter's particular needs and style of hunting. These



*Permanent and portable tree stands that require the use of nails or screw-in steps to climb up a tree often result in damaging that same tree.*

private property, you must obtain permission to build a permanent stand. In Virginia, it is prohibited to construct permanent tree stands in any of the national forests, state forests, or department-owned lands.

Fabricated stands may either be homemade or commercially manufactured. Of the commercially available stands there are four basic types; simple platforms, self-climbing, integral ladder and mobile-trailer. Simple platforms usually are 2' x 2½', secured by a chain and turnbuckle or ratchet and webbing, with or without a seat. Depending on construction, most weigh between 10 and 25 pounds, but are limited to the tree diameters of eight to 18 inches. Access to the tree stand is dependent on screw-in steps, blocks strapped to the trunk, nails, railroad spikes or a ladder.

Fabricated self-climbing stands seem to provide more safety for the

## Tree Stand Safety Tips

1. Read the instructions that come with your stand.
2. Let other hunters in your party know where you place your stand. Leave a map on the dashboard indicating your location and also the time you will return.
3. Put a whistle, horn, strobe, 2-way radio, or a cell phone in your pack.
4. Don't move seriously injured victims; treat for shock, stop the bleeding, and go for help. Mark a trail out.
5. Wear a safety belt whenever using a tree stand, especially while climbing or descending.
6. Practice, practice, practice using your tree stand.
7. Inspect stand for damage before and after each use.
8. Securely attach stand to tree.
9. Always use a hauling rope for your gear, gun or bow.
10. Tie hauling rope to belt or stand when climbing to keep hands free.
11. Unload gun before climbing or descending stand.
12. Be especially careful using tree stands during rain, snow and ice conditions.
13. Be sure screw-in steps are tight against the tree and at the correct angle.
14. Don't use tree stands if you're tired, sick or on medications.
15. Always treat tree stands with the same respect as you would a loaded gun.
16. Wear blaze orange to let other hunters in the area know where you are.



user. They are best used on straight trees, are easily relocated to adapt to changing patterns of the deer, and are safe while ascending and descending. The sit down, stand up, pull up action required to climb may be difficult to learn at first, but once you get the hang of it you can be up the tree and ready to hunt in just a few minutes. Home-made climbing stands can be questionable, especially if, to save money, you use cheap materials or a design that isn't strong enough to hold the weight of the hunter. (Commercially constructed stands will weld and bolt the parts together.)

How the stand is attached to the tree varies in a number of ways. Generally, stands will use a metal band, nylon straps, blades designed to bite into the tree, or chains with turnbuckles.

In many parts of the country, hunters will use a type of ladder stand. Most are designed with an internal ladder and platform for 1 or 2 persons, and are 10 to 15 feet above ground. Of course, the higher up they go the more unstable they become. These stands are somewhat dangerous to erect until they are properly secured to the tree. Ladder stands may be attached without damage to most any tree. They are easier for older hunters or those with disabilities, to climb into and they provide more lateral movement. However, ladder stands are noisy to carry into the woods, can weigh up to 60 pounds, and are expensive.

Although not commonly found in many hunt camps, there is a growing use of trailered platforms designed to lift a person up to a desired height by mechanical means. This vertical lifting device is towed to the site and erected along edges of fields or vehicle trails. While mobility with trailer stands is limited, many hunters who are wheelchair-dependent are finding these platforms allow them to enjoy the outdoors as well.

No tree stand would be complete without certain accessories. The most important of course, is a safety belt. Currently, there are a number of



devices on the market. Some of them can be extremely dangerous. Hunters should consider the following before selecting a safety belt for the type of hunting they do. First, the simple belt or rope loop. They are simple to use, cheap, and can be carried in your pocket. These belts are easy to put on and adjust, however they can be dangerous. Most belts are placed around the waist. If the hunter falls, the belt could cause him to hang upside down. If this occurs, the hunter could lose consciousness in 2 to 3 minutes. During the fall, it is quite possible that his head could slam against the tree, knocking him out and therefore unable to call for help. Worse yet, the belt could slip up around the chest or throat and restrict breathing. If you receive a safety belt of this type

*With safety belt in place, Todd Suits finds the ease of a self-climber tree stand to be perfect while hunting with a black powder rifle. Even during the early black powder season, the use of blaze orange is an added safety measure.*

with your new tree stand, throw it away.

Another type of safety belt, one that is much safer than the simple belt or rope, is a chest harness. A chest harness is simple to put on and adjust. In a fall it distributes the person's weight so they fall in an upright position. With these type belts, it is less likely the device will ride up on the diaphragm or throat and cut off air supply. Some models of the chest harness can be used to drag the deer out of the woods.

Chest harnesses can cost as much

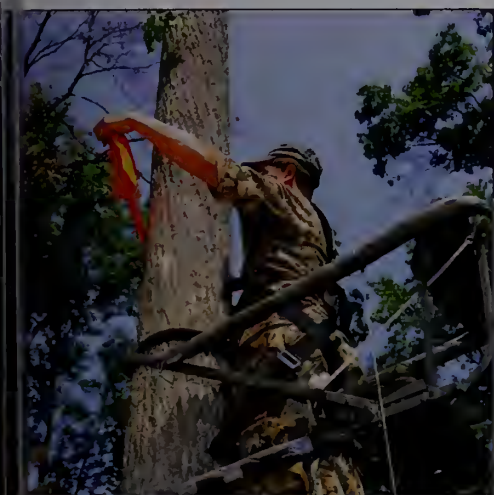


as \$30.00 for a better quality device. The few dollars spent on a quality harness may save you many dollars in hospital expenses or a long-term disability. The device I prefer is a full body harness. It is designed to go over the shoulders, around the waist, and under the legs. It is sometimes called a parachute style harness. This is, without a doubt, the best restraint device available. It provides a cushioned fall, leaving the hunter in an upright position, with minimum potential for injury. The price of one of these devices can run upwards of \$50.00. Again, it is prudent to spend the money for one of these versus experiencing a permanent, disabling injury or death.

cheap and easy to make these steps, they have several inherent problems. First, because of the narrow width of the block, wet, muddy or snow covered boots tend to slip off the block. The rope can deteriorate if exposed to the elements for any period of time.

There are a number of commercially fabricated steps on the market today. Some are screw-in, strap-on, or use a chain. The tread on the step is a critical factor to any hunter. Often the step surface is a rounded rod, or is flat and not slip resistant. When improperly attached to the tree the step could be at a bad angle, causing the hunter to slip. The step may not be rated for the weight it is

Each year before the hunting season begins, carefully inspect your tree stands. Look for any loose nuts or bolts. Be sure all weld joints are secure and not cracked. Check for any frayed nylon straps, torn or cut belts and chains, or missing parts. Repaint it if you wish, but make sure that you don't use a paint that will leave a slick surface if the stand gets ice, rain or snow on it. If you use a permanent stand, check to be sure that it is still sturdy, that nails haven't pulled out or boards have weakened. If you haul your stand around in the back of a vehicle, always inspect it before and after you head out for the woods. These few minutes may make the difference



Consider this for a moment. A 200-pound person dropping 12 inches with a 4-inch cushion exerts 490 pounds on the harness. That same person dropping 24 inches puts 692 pounds on the harness. A 200-pound person dropping 12 feet will exert more than 8,000 pounds on the harness and hit the ground at approximately 21 miles per hour. Is it any wonder, then, why falls from tree stands result in severe injuries? So it makes good sense to buy only the best safety harness for hunting from a tree stand.

Other accessories include blocks, steps and spikes to ascend and descend from the stand. Blocks can be fabricated from 2 x 4's and rope. The block is wrapped around the tree at intervals allowing the hunter to climb up to the stand. Although it is

to carry. If the step isn't tight against the tree, it could even pull out entirely. Screw-in steps could eventually kill a tree. Railroad or long metal spikes are seen in use by hunters as well. Again, they are cheap to buy. The hunter can easily lose his footing and fall to the ground.

If you look through outdoor catalogs, you will find other accessories for your tree stand. Some come with camouflage netting to wrap around the stand to disguise the hunter's movements, along with an umbrella to keep the rain off. You can even put straps with hooks around the tree to hold all of your gear while you're in the stand. But one of the most important pieces of equipment that every tree stand hunter must use is a rope to haul the gear and firearm or bow up to the stand.

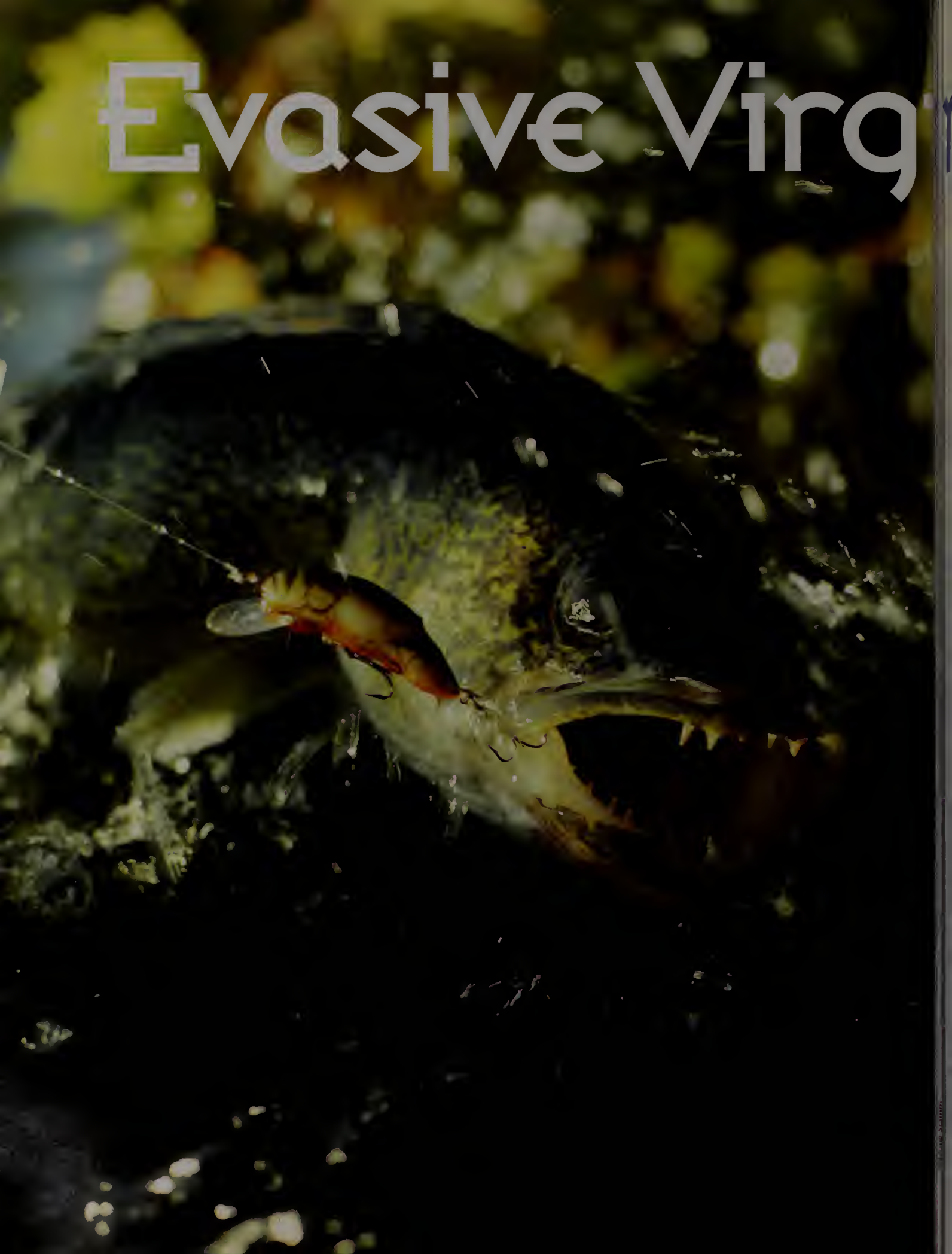
between a safe and successful hunting trip or a painful trip to the hospital.

Tree stands are safe—when used properly. They can be a major asset to your hunting experience and spell the difference between success and failure. □

*Richard L. Holdcraft has been a practicing safety and health professional for over 20 years. He is also a hunter safety education instructor.*

*The staff of Virginia Wildlife magazine would like to thank the youth of Cedar Mountain 4-H Shooting Sports Club in Culpepper, Virginia, for their assistance in helping with the photographs in this article. We would also like to congratulate them for having been chosen out of 10,000 gun clubs nationwide, to receive the 1997 NRA Youth Club Achievement Award. The award recognizes education and sportsmanship as the foundation of a strong and successful club program.*

# Evasive Virg





# nia Walleyes

by Bob Gooch

**Y**es, there are walleye in Virginia waters, plenty of them. During the decade beginning in 1985, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) released almost 20 million fingerling walleyes in our waters. More than half of them went into the large impoundments such as lakes Anna, Chesdin, Claytor, Buggs Island, and Smith Mountain. The rivers and small impoundments, including the DGIF lakes, received smaller numbers of fingerlings. Walleye waters are scattered all over Virginia, from Lake Trashmore in Norfolk to the Powell River in deep Southwest Virginia, and from Buggs Island Lake on the North Carolina border to Burke Lake in Northern Virginia.

With so many walleye finning the dark waters of Virginia, why aren't anglers catching more of them? Many of those released fingerlings have long ago reached maturity and probably since died of old age. That was not what DGIF had in mind when it introduced this fine fish to so many Virginia waters. Walleye are a challenging game fish, and no fish is tastier on the table.

The walleye is a member of the perch family. Yes, perch! The family is not large. Nothing like the better known sunfish family. In addition to the walleye, there is also the yellow

perch. The third member of the perch family is the sauger, some of which are found in deep Southwest Virginia streams, such as the Clinch and Powell. Fisheries biologists in the Dakotas have successfully crossed the sauger and the walleye to produce the saugeye. Before we introduce the saugeye to Virginia waters, let's try to harvest more of the walleyes now so available to anglers.

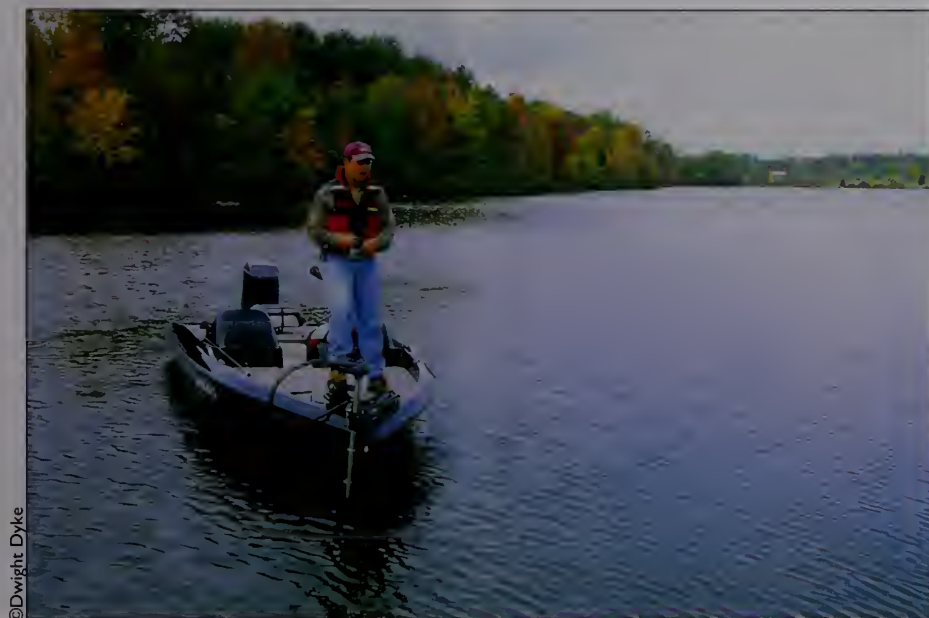
A better understanding of the fish might encourage more anglers to try for it. It's entirely possible that the walleye creel statewide has been light because very few anglers fish for them. Make a quick survey of fishermen in your acquaintance and see how many of them target walleye. Virginia anglers have been brought up on bass, trout, panfish, and catfish, and, in more recent years, landlocked striped bass. Bass and trout fishing techniques won't produce consistently when tried on walleye, but a catfish angler caught

a world record walleye on a live minnow back in 1960. A 25-pound walleye was caught in Old Hickory Lake in Tennessee. The current Virginia record is a 14-pound, 6-ounce fish taken from the New River by Robert C. Acker. Acker caught his prize fish on a Rapala, an excellent imitation of a small minnow. Chances are most walleye taken in Virginia are no doubt being caught by anglers fishing for the more common species.

The walleye is so named for a good reason—those bleary looking eyes. The fish looks like it has been on a recent bender. It hates sunlight. Night is the ideal time to fish for walleye, and, according to DGIF Fisheries Biologist Ed Steinkoenig, DGIF lakes now remain open 24 hours a day just to give anglers a better crack at the walleye.

During the daylight hours anglers should look for water that is well shaded or well colored. "When I'm looking for walleye during the

*For more than a decade walleye have been stocked throughout Virginia. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries is in the process of encouraging more anglers to go out and try their luck at catching this delectable freshwater fish.*



©Dwight Dyke

day light hours I look for feeding carp," said Leon Houle, Minnesota high school teacher and professional walleye angler, I visited a few months ago. "The carp muddy the water and that attracts the walleye."

I've fished successfully for walleye over much of the northern United States and Canada, but Virginia walleye are tougher. Over the years I have visited with guides, professional tournament anglers, and fellow anglers who happened to be good walleye fishermen. In the process I've pried from them bits of information in a haphazard manner, but information that should give any angler an edge when he goes after walleye.

Walleye fishing tackle is specialized, particularly when fishing with natural baits such as leeches, minnows, or worms, all of which are good walleye baits. No one rod will serve the complete walleye angler, but for casting and trolling with lures in the 1/4 to 1/2-ounce range a 5 1/2 to 6-foot medium power, fast action, spinning rod will serve as an all-purpose walleye rod. Most bass anglers already have several such rods in their collection.

As the walleye angler progresses he will feel the need for additional rods. Take the angler who prefers natural baits when fishing for walleye. On live bait the walleye is noted for its soft bite, and a 6 to 7-foot rod with a sensitive tip is a good choice for such fishing. The modern boron or graphite rod is more sensitive than fiberglass. Another feature to look for is a rod in which the blank runs completely through the rod handle. Such a rod tends to better transmit vibrations to the angler's hands.

The reel should match the rod. Check the line recommendations on both your rod and reel and match them accordingly.

Walleye can be very line shy in clear water. Under such conditions the lightest monofilament line an angler feels comfortable with should improve his chances of hooking a walleye. In clear water, where there are no obstructions, 8 to 10-pound test line is about right; in

weed-filled water or water where there is considerable brush or rocks a heavier line, say 12 pound test, is a better choice.

The trout is a cold water fish and largemouth bass prefer much warmer water. The walleye falls between the two. They are seldom found in water temperatures above 80°F, but they prefer temperature ranges in the 65° to 75°F. Given a choice, the fish also prefers clean, hard bottoms—or a combination of gravel, rock, and sand—something a bit rare in most Virginia impoundments.

For the beginning walleye angler the natural baits might be a good choice. Among the fish's favorites are leeches, minnows, and worms. Such baits account for a large percentage of the walleye caught by anglers. Small fish make up a major portion of the walleye's food. The world record walleye was caught on a live minnow and the Virginia

record on an artificial lure resembling a black and white minnow. Live minnows are always a good choice, and they are readily available in bait and tackle shops. An angler can catch his own, of course.

Leeches can be hard to find, but worms are not. A lot of walleye are caught with nightcrawlers. Natural baits can be fished in conjunction with jigs or spinners, but some anglers prefer to forego the hardware and fish the bait by itself. Minnows are best hooked just behind the dorsal fin, but be careful not to hit the backbone. This will kill the otherwise lively minnow. Leeches can be hooked through the sucker end or through the middle. Anglers have a tendency to thread worms on their hooks, but walleye anglers simply run their hook through the worm and let both ends dangle.

Natural bait anglers should use size 6 hooks for leeches and worms and size 4 for minnows.



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Detecting a strike is part of the secret to successful natural bait fishing. The bite of the walleye is subtle, often hard to detect. The angler may feel nothing more than a general tightening of his line. Don't act too quickly when a bite is detected. First take up any slack in your line, and wait until you feel weight. Then strike. An upward snap of the wrist is all that is necessary.

Many anglers like to use bobbers to suspend the bait just off of the bottom or at the depth the sonar indicates the fish are suspended. They refer to it as slipbobber fishing.

As many, or even more, walleye are caught on artificial lures while casting, trolling, or jigging. Minnow shaped crankbaits, in the three to six-inch range, are the choice of many walleye anglers when they turn to artificial lures. Most prefer lippered baits that will dive when retrieved rapidly. They can be used casting or trolling. Trolling is a good

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*Walleye are known to be sensitive to light and anglers will find that fishing during cloudy days or at night will increase their odds. The current Virginia record walleye was caught in the New River by Robert C. Acker, and weighed 14 pounds, 6 ounces.*

way to locate walleye in unfamiliar waters.

I recently asked Daryl Christensen, of Wisconsin, to name his favorite method of fishing for walleye, he replied, "jigging, jigging, and more jigging." Christensen is a professional walleye tournament fisherman with 13 national titles on his record. Many of the other angling pros also expressed a preference for jigging.

A favorite jigging lure is the Virginia-produced Hopkins Lure. Others include the vibrating blade, a minnow-shaped lure with a trio of holes in its back for attaching the line, and the tailspin, which also has holes in its back for attaching the line. These lures are usually worked vertically. Locate some fish on your sonar and then drop the lure to them. The walleye will usually hit a sinking lure, so a tight line is needed to detect the strike.

Jigs also include a wide variety of leadheads in different shapes and dressing that vary from marabou and bucktail to a wide selection of soft plastics.

During February and March Virginia walleye begin their spawning runs, deserting the deep waters of the lakes temporarily heading up feeder streams in water depths of six to eight feet. Among them are the Dan and Staunton rivers out of Buggs Island Lake, the New River out of Claytor Lake, and the Smith River out of Philpott Lake. This could well offer the beginning walleye angler the best opportunity to reel one of these remarkable fish.

There are millions of walleye in Virginia's rich and varied waters, maybe a new state record, or even a new world record could be waiting for you. A few anglers are tapping this exciting new resource, but most are not. The Virginia walleye does not feel any fishing pressure, and anglers should change that. □

*Bob Gooch is a highly respected Virginia outdoor writer and a frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife.*

## Virginia Walleye Waters

**Rivers:** Appomattox, Clinch, James, Mataponi, New, Nottoway, Powell and Shenandoah

**Large Impoundments:** Anna, Briery Creek, Buggs Island, Chesdin, Claytor, Carvin's Cove, Cohoon, Flannagan, Gas-ton, Leesville, Little Creek, Lunga, Manas-sas, Occoquan, Philpott, Smith Mountain, South Holston and Western Branch.

**Small Impoundments:** Abel, Amelia, Arrowhead, Beaver Creek, Bradford, Brit-tle, Burke, Clear Creek, Curtis, Emporia Reservoir, Fairystone Lake, Fluvanna, Fort Pickett, Frederick, Gordonsville, Har-wood Mills, Hidden Valley, Hungry Moth-er, Lakeview, Laura, Lone Star, Lower Sherando, Maury, Motts, Ni, Orange, Ri-vanna, Robertson, Smith, Swift Creek, Tams, Trashmore and Whitehurst.



# Journal



Lee Walker

Col. Jeffrey A. Urez (left) congratulates Robert C. Mathers on his outstanding service.

## Virginia Game Warden Receives Award for Valor

Sgt. Robert C. Mathers, Jr., was honored by the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police for his professionalism in the protection of the citizens of the Commonwealth. The Award of Valor specifically recognized his courage in dealing with the bank robbery and hostage situation in Kilmarnock earlier this year.

On January 14th, 1998, while on routine waterfowl patrol in Lancaster County, Game Warden Sgt. Mathers heard a radio call from the Kilmarnock Police Department. An armed robbery was in progress at the Chesapeake Bank. At the time of the call, only one police unit was en route to Kilmarnock.

Sgt. Mathers, a 15-year veteran with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF), and newly assigned game warden Dallas Neel responded after hearing the call for assistance. Upon entering the bank parking lot, he encountered a female suspect holding two bank employees hostage.

Sgt. Mathers positioned his patrol

vehicle at a 45° angle to the left of a parked vehicle and took cover behind it. His position was 15 yards from the suspect and the two hostages. One female hostage was released unharmed and allowed to return to the bank. Bank employees advised Sgt. Mathers that they had not seen the suspect's gun because she concealed that hand in her jacket sleeve.

As a Kilmarnock police officer attempted to negotiate the release of the remaining male hostage, the suspect yelled, "I'll have to kill him, I'll have to kill him." Struggling, the hostage pulled away. The suspect lost her grasp and then grabbed the hostage by her wrists. At this point Officer Mathers rushed in, grabbed the robber, and forced her to the ground. She was handcuffed and turned over to Kilmarnock police officers.

Colonel Jeffrey Uerz, Law Enforcement Division, DGIF, commented, "Sgt. Mathers' decisive action, excellent training, and courage brought himself, his family and the Department this great honor. He is a fine example of the dedicated pro-

fessionals who serve and protect the Commonwealth's citizens and its wildlife resources."

The Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police recognized Sgt. Mathers during their Awards Ceremony on August 11, 1998, in Hampton, Virginia. □

## Batteau Festival Trail

by Sarah White

Well worth reading is W.E. Trout's *James River Batteau Festival Trail*. This brief book combines a history of the graceful boats from the past, and gives an account of their rediscovery among the growing number of enthusiasts and festivals. A topographical map of the James from Lynchburg to Richmond is also included.

Similar in shape to the dugout canoes of the Native Americans who first lived along the James, the batteau was developed in the later half of the 18th century to carry tobacco and other plantation products down river to Richmond. Usually between 50 and 75 feet long, these boats typically had crews of at least three—a steering oarsman and two to pole. Often there were steering oars at both ends of the boat. While these sturdy vessels were widely used well into the 19th century, they were eventually made obsolete by the growing network of railroads. The Kanawah Canal was bought by the railroad and its Great Basin in Richmond was filled and made into a rail yard.

For almost a century the batteau would lie forgotten, until discovered in 1983 when the rail yard in Richmond was torn up to make room for downtown high rises. The tale of the discovery and the piecing together of the lost boats is an interesting one and Trout tells it well.



Another thing Trout does well is to discuss the various festivals and local activities that involve the batteau and the James. He also does a good job of describing and mapping walking and driving tours of the canal area in and around Richmond. Trout's little book is well-made and is worth perusing if you are interested in the history of Virginia's waterways. □



DGIF Board Chairman, J. Carson Quarles, Roanoke, (left) accepts a copy of the limited edition fund raising print "Manley's Field" from David Horne, Director for Hunters for the Hungry.

## Hunters for the Hungry

The upcoming deer season will mark the beginning of the 8th year of operation for the Hunters for the Hungry program in Virginia. During that time the nonprofit charity has distributed over 675,000 pounds of venison to the needy of the Commonwealth. That volume is enough to provide over 2,700,000 servings to those who otherwise would do without.

The combined efforts of Virginia's hunters, processors, feeding agencies, and financial supporters have proven to be of significant benefit. Hunters for the Hungry is truly a win-win situation. Our annual deer harvest is more fully utilized. Deer management is promoted. Hunters are involved in community service. And, the hungry among us are provided a protein rich item to supplement what otherwise are inadequate supplies of food.

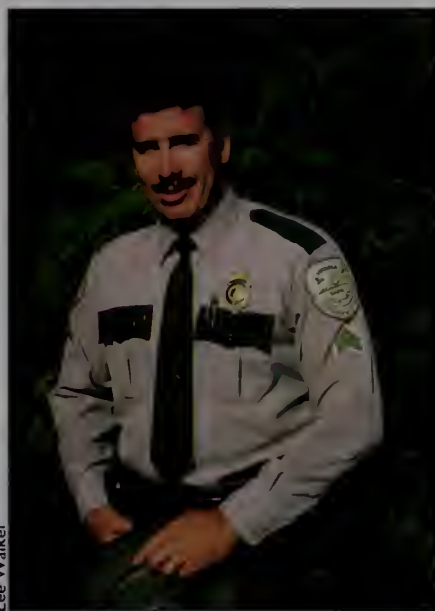
Despite the great success of the program, there is much potential to expand the effort. The Hunters for the Hungry staff projects that a quar-

ter of a million pounds of venison could be received annually if funding was available to cover the cost of processing. The program operates entirely from donated financial support. All contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

Virginia's hunters are currently providing more deer than the program can accept. The staff of the Hunters for the Hungry effort hope that funds will be available in 1998 to surpass the record distribution of 1997—141,687 pounds. Financial support will determine how many of Virginia's needy are served.

For more information on the Hunters for the Hungry program or to contribute financially write P.O. Box 304, Big Island, VA 24526. The staff can be reached by phone at 1-800-352-4868 or through e-mail at: staff@h4hungry.org. □

## Sgt. Randy Grauer Named Game Warden of the Year



The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) announced that Sgt. Randy Grauer was recently named "1998 Game Warden of the Year." The five-member panel cited him as a true professional, a problem solver, and having an outstanding work ethic. He continually

demonstrates initiative and enthusiasm as he carries out his law and regulation enforcement, as well as public education duties. He has acted as a role model to help shape public attitudes and behaviors.

In his 16th year, Sgt. Grauer's efforts have enhanced public support for DGIF programs and for compliance with wildlife and boating safety laws. This has been invaluable to the agency's accomplishment of its mission in Northern Virginia.

The recipient has been extremely active in urban outreach in Northern Virginia. Over the past two years, DGIF has initiated an urban outreach program in that metropolitan area. The initiative's purpose is enhanced awareness of the agency's mission, accomplishments and services among the urban population.

Thus far, the greatest effort in the urban outreach program has been witnessed at the Chantilly Outdoor Show and the Fairfax County Fair. Thanks to Sgt. Grauer's efforts, DGIF will be part of a permanent exhibit. Attendance at Prince William County Fair is ranked second only to the Virginia State Fair, with attendance at more than 100,000 annually. This event is the only one of its kind in Northern Virginia.

In past assignments, he served seven years with the Hunter Education program and its outstanding group of hunter education volunteers who serve the 1.5 million residents of Loudoun, Fairfax, and Prince William Counties.

Sgt. Grauer's involvement with his law enforcement duties, along with his educational responsibility and efforts to bring compliance, demonstrates the attributes the law enforcement staff look for in an "Officer of the Year."

The public and his peers find he is most cooperative. The service-oriented attitude he displays repeatedly demonstrates his commitment to the public, DGIF, fellow employees and the Commonwealth.

Sgt. Grauer will be honored and receive his plaque during the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies meeting in Orlando, Florida. □

# RECIPES

by Joan Cone

## Squirrels For Autumn

**S**quirrels probably are Virginia's most sought-after small game. They are fun to hunt and can be transformed into excellent dishes.

After cleaning and skinning, cut your squirrels into quarters. Most of the meat will be on the two hindquarters. I find that precooking squirrels, either by stewing or in a pressure cooker, is the best way to begin. Remove meat from the bones, and you will be left with firm meat which resembles dark meat of turkey in flavor and texture. Now you are ready to use cooked squirrel in casseroles, salads, pot pies and other dishes.

### Menu

*Raspberry Dip*

*Squirrel And Noodles*

*Tomato-Herb Salad*

*Carolyn's Pumpkin Currant Loaf*

### Raspberry Dip

- 1 carton (8 ounces) nonfat raspberry yogurt
- 1 package (3 ounces) light cream cheese, softened
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon peel
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- Assorted fresh fruit

In a bowl, stir together yogurt, cream cheese, sugar, lemon peel and lemon juice. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate 2 hours to blend flavors. Serve with assorted fruit cut into bite-size pieces. Makes 1 ½ cups dip.

### Squirrel and Noodles

- 8 ounces medium or broad egg noodles
- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup sliced mushrooms
- ¼ cup flour
- Salt and pepper to taste

- 2 ½ cups squirrel or chicken broth
- 1 cup shredded Swiss cheese
- 2 cups cut-up cooked, boned squirrel
- 1 cup cooked chopped broccoli, sliced carrots or peas
- Buttered bread crumbs

Cook noodles according to package directions. Meanwhile, in medium skillet, melt butter and cook onion and mushrooms until tender. Stir in flour, salt and pepper. Slowly blend in broth. Bring to a boil and then simmer, stirring constantly, until sauce is thickened. Stir in cheese until melted. Add squirrel and vegetables, then heat through. Toss squirrel mixture with hot, drained noodles and top with bread crumbs. Serves 4.

### Tomato-Herb Salad

- 3 medium tomatoes, sliced
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives

Arrange sliced tomatoes in a 13 x 9 x 2-inch dish. Combine oil, vinegar, salt and pepper in a jar; cover tightly and shake vigorously. Pour dressing over tomatoes. Sprinkle

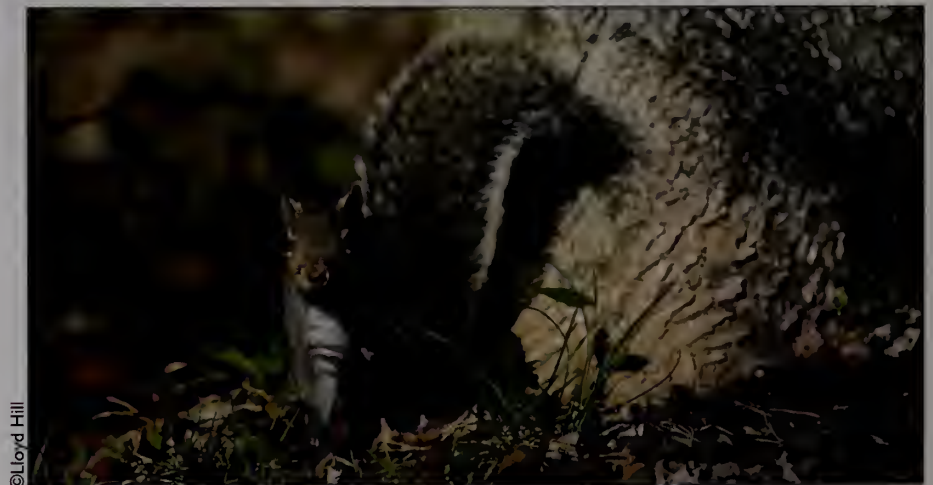
with chives and chill at least 2 hours. Serves 4 to 5.

### Carolyn's Pumpkin Currant Loaf

My friend, Carolyn Campbell of Williamsburg, brought me some of this pumpkin loaf along with the recipe, and I have been making it ever since.

- 1¼ cups sugar
- ½ cup canola oil
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup cooked, mashed pumpkin
- 1¾ cups flour
- ¾ teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ⅓ cup water
- ½ cup dried currants

Preheat oven to 350° F. In a mixer, combine sugar and oil. Blend in eggs and pumpkin. Combine all dry ingredients and slowly add them to the pumpkin mixture. Add water and blend well. Fold in currants. Pour batter into a greased and floured 9 x 5-inch loaf pan. Bake 1 hour or until loaf tests done. Note: This recipe will make three 5 x 3-inch loaves. □







# Naturally Wild

by Spike Knuth

## American Widgeon

One of the more active of our waterfowl is the American widgeon or baldpate. The widgeon is a medium-sized duck. The drake is easily identifiable by its white wing patches, white patch on the top of its head, white belly and dark pointed tail. Its grayish cheeks are separated from its white "pate" by a mask of blackish-green. The females have a grayish head, spotted like the male, but with only a dark eye area and no patch. Both have the pinkish-brown chest and gray sides, with the female somewhat duller. The term widgeon was a catch-all name for all ducks that the old-time duck hunters couldn't recognize, usually females of various species.

Their flight style is similar to teal and has also been likened to a flock of pigeons as they fly in compact groups, moving quickly and erratically, twisting and turning on their sides. Its call is a series of soft, peeping whistles, not unlike a brood of chicks. Hunters frequently use an ordinary referee's whistle to imitate the call and tempt them to the decoys. In some cases they decoy readily, but they can be quite wary, depending on the situation. They sometimes give warning to other ducks because of their alertness, and some hunters include widgeon decoys in their set as "confidence" decoys.

On the water they are very buoyant and can rise quickly when startled on "rattling" wings. A good field mark when they are sitting on the water is the drake's white head

top, and a white mark found near the tail behind the flanks. Another nickname of this duck is "poacher," because of its habit of waiting for a coot, canvasback or other diving duck to surface with a morsel of valisneria grass or other favorite aquatic vegetation, and quickly grab it away.

Widgeon arrive to Virginia from their Canadian breeding grounds in central and western Canada by the

end of October. While more common in the western United States, Virginia hosts a fair number of widgeon from November to January as long as food is available. In addition to Back Bay, Hog Island, Chincoteague and other freshwater marshes, look for them in the Newport News City Reservoir (Lee Hall) at its upper end, and in Richmond's Byrd Park in Shield's and Swan's lakes. □



# October Afield

by Jack Randolph

The trouble with October is there is too much to do. Just about every outdoorsman is in love with October. It is a beautiful month, one that just tugs you out of the house into the great outdoors. For the active sportsman who enjoys both hunting and fishing, his table is full in October, so full he hardly knows what sport to pursue.

Those of a hunting persuasion will probably hunt one thing or another. After a summer of abstinence it's time to glide through the squirrel woods with a .22 in hand or to wait out a buck from a well-placed tree stand. My problem is when I am out hunting I wonder if I should be fishing.

If you are just now starting your hunting season and any kind of migratory bird is on your agenda, remember that you must obtain a HIP number from DGIF. Call 1-800-WETLAND (938-5263), answer a few questions and write the number given you on your hunting license; you are now square with the game warden, at least as far as the HIP number is concerned.

October is a fine month for small-mouth bass fishing and it is also a time to fish for fall-stocked trout. Fallen leaves floating on the streams can be a problem, but if you can get a bait through them the fish are apt to be willing to bite. Since there are now a number of hunters afield, a hunter-orange hat is definitely in style for any nimrod or angler.

October is a prime month for largemouth bass, big blue catfish and for those schools of landlocked striped bass that we find in many of our reservoirs. Shorter days and dropping water temperatures trigger that mysterious mechanism that tell fish that winter is coming and it's time to fatten up.

The members of the pike family—pickerel, muskies and northern pike—bite well this month and before the month is over crappie will be schooled up and biting.

During this month the archery seasons for deer, bear and turkeys open, with the emphasis being on deer. A surprising number of bear are also taken this month. For the gunners, seasons are open for the early duck hunt, for doves and rails and other webless migratory birds. The squirrel season is also open throughout the state. About mid-



Dwight Dyke

month you can start following your coon dogs once again.

October is also prime for surf fishing for channel bass along the southern-most barrier islands on the Eastern Shore. In the bay, in such places as Mobjack Bay and the mouths of the bayside creeks, speckled trout can put on their best show of the year.

Also, this month keep an eye on the resort strip at Virginia Beach. Spot, croakers, puppy drum and king and spanish mackerel offer some first class action, while speckled trout and other species can be encountered in the Lynnhaven and Rudee Inlets. Some excellent flounder action may also be anticipated along the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel.

For many anglers October's main attraction is the opening of the striped bass season in Chesapeake Bay and its tidal tributaries. If the fishing follows its usual pattern, smaller stripers will be encountered this month with the larger ones to come in late November and into December.

Many of the stripers will be caught on chumlines in the upper reaches of the bay, but in the lower end of the bay trolling, particularly wire line trolling, will be popular. Quite a few stripers are caught plug casting around the Chesapeake Bay's rocky islands. Fishing with live spot and croakers is also a way to find larger stripers early in the season. Casting such lures as Rat-L-Traps and bucktails will also be effective on striped bass in the tidal reaches of the James, Chickahominy, Pamunkey, Mattaponi and Rappahannock Rivers.

Years ago, when my children were small, I used to enjoy walking with them in the woods at this time of the year. Together, we would explore, looking for tracks and collecting colorful leaves and other objects the kids could use for show and tell at school. We would look for hickory nuts and butternuts and I would show the children places where a gang of turkeys scratched through the leaf litter or where a few deer pushed furrows in the leaves as they foraged for acorns. We would sit quietly and the children's eyes would widen with wonder as a deer minced through the forest or a distant owl wondered "who was cooking for you."

As the quiet fell through the forest with the coming of night we would automatically speak in hushed tones as we quietly retreated to our home, leaving the wild things to enjoy theirs. □





# On The Water

by Kathy Gillikin, Boating Education Instructor

## Out After Dark

**D**uring Eastern Standard Time the days will be shorter again and the waterways will get dark much earlier than during the summer months. Without cutting your boat trip short, here are a few reminders about boating after dark.

### Lights

The best advice is to use your boat lights from dusk on into the night, even if you are anchored to do some fishing. The main purpose for lighting is to make sure other boaters can see you at night or during periods of restricted visibility (fog, rain, snow, storm conditions, etc.) The lights set aside for navigation use are either green, red, white or yellow. Blue lights are reserved for law enforcement and must never be used on a recreational boat.

Where do these lights go? Recreational boats that operate between sunset and sunrise or during periods of restricted visibility must use navigation lights as follows.

In general, for all powerboats and sailing vessels...

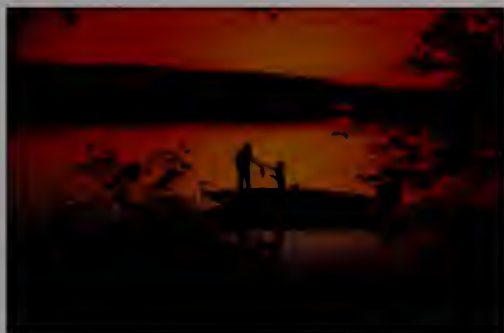
1. A combination red and green light must be displayed from the bow, or red and green running lights must be displayed on the port and starboard sides of the boat. The red lights must be displayed on the port (left) side, and the green lights must be displayed on the starboard (right) side.

2. At the stern, a 360° white light must be displayed at the highest point. Tall boats must display either a white light from the highest mast and/or a combination red and green light.

For boats operated by oars...

1. Lights must be visible from the boat in time to avoid an accident. This includes an electric torch, white flashlight or lantern showing a white light.

2. Or the boat may use the same lights required on a sailing vessel, with the combination red and green running lights and a white stern light correctly placed.



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For all boats at anchor or stopped in a channel a 360° white light must be displayed at all times.

### Night or Reduced Visibility Navigation Situations

When you see **red and white lights** moving on the water it means the other boat is ahead of you and moving to your port (left) side. This boat has the right-of-way and you should stay to the right and behind the boat's white light.

When you see **green and white lights** moving on the water, it means the other boat is ahead of you and moving to your starboard (right) side. You have the right-of-way, but are equally responsible to avoid a collision. Maintain your speed and course. Reduce your speed and turn

to your starboard (right) if the other boat is not accommodating you.

When you see **red and green lights and a white light**, the other boat is on a collision course with you. Both boats should move to their right and pass port-to-port.

When you see only a **white light**, it means either the other boat has anchored or the boat is straight ahead of you. You should reduce your speed and move to your left or right to pass the boat, giving them a wide gap.

### Courtesy After Dark

- Don't drink and operate a boat. Reduced visibility at night will add to alcohol's negative effect on your vision.
- Decrease your speed at night to allow for reduced visibility.
- Keep voice and noise levels down. Sound carries well on the water and at night it is usually more quiet.
- Offer to help someone who is stranded by calling for assistance or offering safety supplies.
- Use your whistle to let your intentions be known. If you want to move to the right and pass another boat on your port (left) side, blow 1 short blast of your whistle. If you want to move to the left and pass another boat on your starboard (right) side, blow 2 short blasts of your whistle. The other boater should return the same sound signal if she/he agrees with what you want to do. Five blasts means danger or disagreement.

Please refer to the *Virginia Motorboat Owner's Guide* for more specific guidelines. □

# Virginia Wildlife Magazine

**the gift that  
will be  
enjoyed all  
year long.**

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